


THE INNER DOOR

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AN SULLIVAN



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THE INNER DOOR



"You must not say good-by with sorrow," she answered shakily

THE INNER DOOR

BY
ALAN SULLIVAN

FRONTISPIECE BY
WILLIAM VAN DRESSER



NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1917

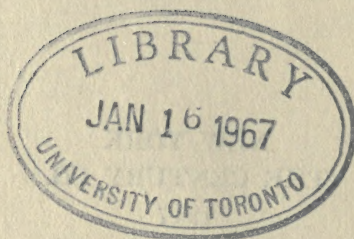
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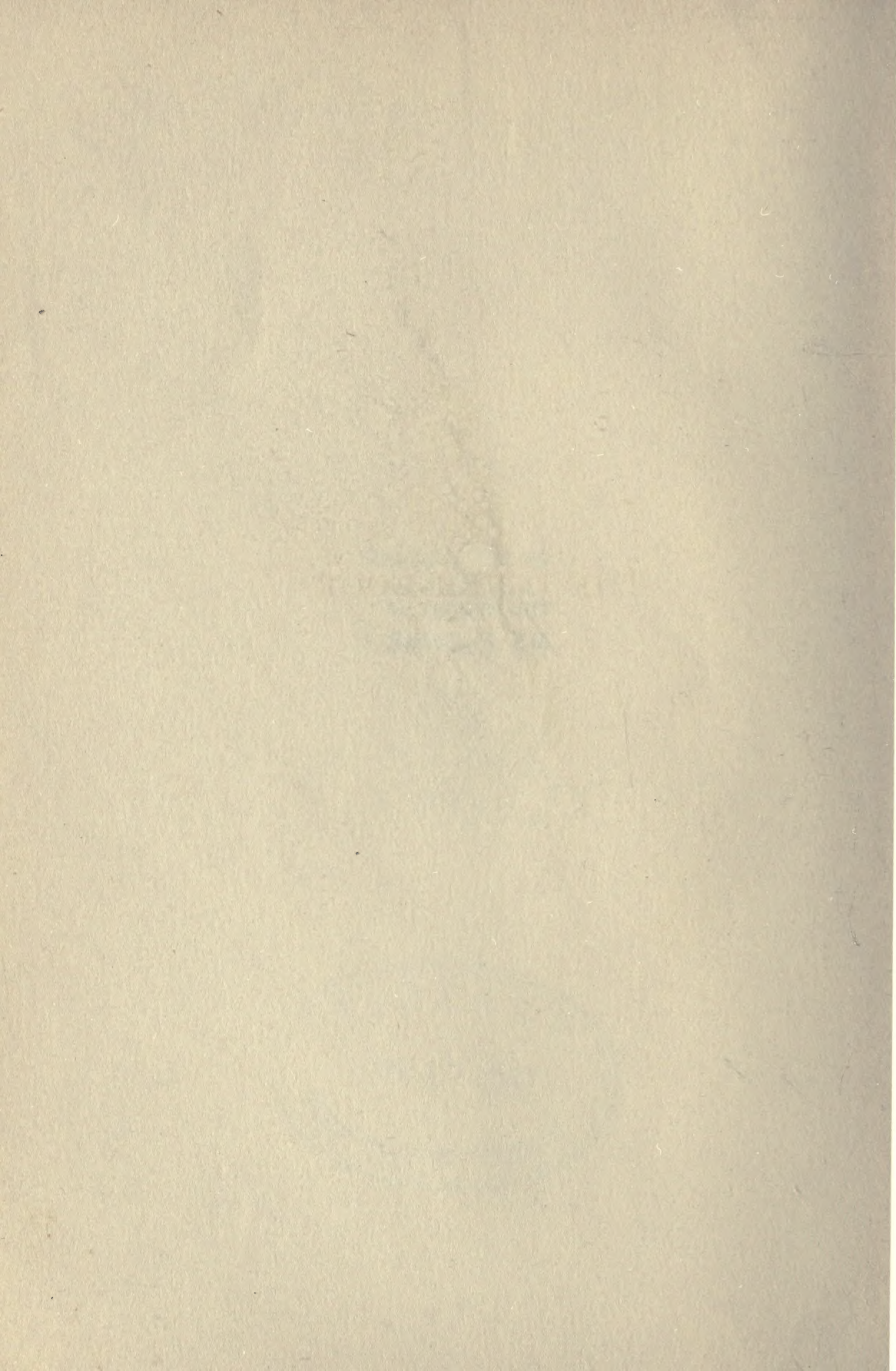
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TO
THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER



THE INNER DOOR

AUTHOR'S AND PUBLISHER'S NOTE

All the characters and incidents in this story are purely fictional, and nothing in it refers to any existing individual or company.

THE INNER DOOR

CHAPTER I

JUST before old James Percival died he turned on his side and, staring into his daughter's eyes, whispered faintly, "Keep the wheels turning, and hang on to Pethick."

With that reflection he slipped out of life, and the empty shell of him lay dumb and sightless, but his other self was doubtless investigating new and remarkable processes under totally changed conditions.

His death made a stir. Not so much in the exclusive circles to which he was born and had long since neglected, as in those wider groups of manufacturers which for years had watched him with that respect born of envy. The old man—for so he was called—had developed a nose for business, that put most of them—even the Trust itself—in the shade. Living moderately without either communicable vice or virtue, he put straight back into the factory that which he made out of it. The death of his wife, in a year of intense competition,

shadowed him for a while, but he emerged from the shadow with a keener business instinct than before.

Year after year the factory overflowed with new buildings, and the drone of its mechanism swelled into a deeper roar. When Sylvia was ten, her father had reckoned he was worth half a million. He put to that a round fifteen per cent. every successive birthday till she was twenty-two. Then very suddenly he relinquished his labor forever. He had paid her bills without comment or question, and, at the end, without a tremor consigned her to the care of his lawyer, with a grim warning that she was neither to sell the factory nor interfere in its management. For women and work, he had always held, there was no common multiple.

In his will there was one more proviso. The other branch of the Percivals, synchronizing a moderate income with a wholesome appetite for beautiful things, had set up house in Paris. That James did not come to see them and bring Sylvia, was so old a grievance that it was axiomatic. James knew it, chuckled, and held his peace. Paris was too far from the factory. But on the day when he looked at Chambers over the flat desk in his private office and dictated his will, it had occurred to him that in the most unlikely event of

his early death it would be an excellent idea that Sylvia wipe out the family arrears before contracting new obligations by marriage.

Twelve months after his funeral, Sylvia surveyed the world with a totally new interest. It had heretofore been bounded by the factory and the pathetic solicitude of Mrs. Chambers, who regarded her as a jewel, to capture which the eligible manhood of the city was piratically minded. Sylvia saw it, laughed, and, abandoning every feminine barricade, stepped forth, tingling with the taste of life. In the immediate foreground was Kenneth Landon.

Mrs. Chambers was beginning to accept him with a certain helpless sense of having done what she could to prevent it. Had Sylvia been plain, and she was not, had she been poor instead of having a hundred thousand a year, her guardian's wife would have embraced him as a benignant demigod. But the factory, potent in its profits, hung like a black diamond on the girl's white neck, and its mechanical marvels demanded recognition even at the altar. That Kenneth was the son of his father, spoke for much, but the heir of a broker, thought Mrs. Chambers, stood in line for a questionable legacy. She loathed manufacturing, but she was terrified at the stock market; and manufacturing, after all, did the trick. In her own domain Mrs.

Chambers was called a relative woman, disclaiming distinction and losing identity in her very domesticity. She seemed one of those who grow into a house and are moved about with the chairs and tables. Her husband loved her because she disturbed not his weary soul, and where she went peace went with her. Sylvia loved her because she had proffered to her first grief a large and passionless bosom. Society loved her because she moved through its particular pool without a ripple of either envy or expectation.

Sylvia's visit was to be carried out as arranged. Kenneth had insisted on that, though there was a pang in the resolution. Sylvia demurred, then loved him all the more. The poignant moment had come, and, drawn by an uncomfortable sense of duty, she went first to say good-by to her superintendent.

At the end of a long street of small houses the factory heaved up its great bulk. The building in which old James Percival had made his first product had long ago been engulfed in an avalanche of extensions whose irregular outline was broken here and there by squat towers. Time and weather was robbing these rambling structures of any sharp distinction, till now the mass looked weary of the elements. Small windows blinked through a grimy coating, and, above all, four great

chimneys vomited endless clouds of slow and oily smoke.

Toward this throbbing hive Sylvia's car spun like a swift and glistening beetle. The office door opened almost before the motor stopped, and Pethick came quickly down the steps. Standing bare-headed, the sun smote hard on his lean face. His lips were thin and tight, his glance quick and nervous. His sleeves were rolled up. A faint odor of factory seemed to surround him.

He reached for the door handle. "Won't you come in?"

Sylvia leaned forward from the rear seat. "I'm sorry. I'm afraid there's not time. I just wanted to see you for a moment. You know, I'm going away to-night."

Pethick swung the door open. "Thank you for coming out here—but—" he hesitated—"really I don't believe there's anything important. Please come in."

She glanced up at the high brick walls and experienced the slightest shrinking of her body.

"I'm afraid I can't. There's really not a spare minute. Everything's going well—isn't it?"

He nodded. "Business better than ever. Will you be away long?"

"Nearly a year, I think. Oh—you remember

that woman I telephoned about, She came to see me yesterday and told me that that accident was really not her husband's fault. I would n't mention it now, but—she needed help—and I helped."

A wrinkle suddenly appeared on Pethick's smooth face. She glanced at him almost appealingly and went on with a touch of hesitation. "Their condition is really very bad. I—thought you ought to know about it."

"I'm sorry you did that," he said slowly. "It's rather taking factory matters out of my hands. I'm doing the best I can with a difficult crowd, but if the men I discharge have the right to protest—there is n't much point to it, is there?"

A pink spot grew in Sylvia's cheek. "Please don't be vexed. I was told the man had been working for twenty-four hours and was nearly asleep. If his time-card shows that—and he says it will—don't you think the matter should be overlooked—and after all," she concluded with a lift in her voice, "is n't that our fault—not his?"

Pethick did not answer at once but looked at her curiously. "That would hardly excuse him. Individuals occasionally suffer—but we can't help that. It's easier to get new men than to alter rules—otherwise there would n't be much manufacturing. However,"—he shrugged his shoulder—"just as you wish. I'll take him on again."

There was something in Sylvia's soul that wanted to burst out and express itself—but she felt like a butterfly whose dainty wings had for an instant fluttered against the dingy factory windows. She scanned Pethick with a wistfulness which, even if he understood it, provoked no more graceful concession. He seemed passively sure of himself, and, knowing the inside of those brick walls better than any man, he waited for the next move. This invested him with a certain cold immunity against which her better impulse went to pieces.

"I don't want to upset things," she conceded uncomfortably. "I'll see to his wife. So for a while, good-by. I'm sure everything will go well."

Behind his passionless gaze moved something that withdrew swiftly, even as she noted it. "You'll be away for eight or ten months?"

"Yes, most of it in France with my aunt."

"Then you'll be there in November?" There was the faintest assumption in his voice.

"Yes." Again his eyes baffled her.

"I'm taking a few weeks then—the first in five years. Perhaps I'll run over."

There was that in his tone which chilled, then left her groping. However essential to the business, he was, she had long ago decided, temperament-

ally remote. But now she began to recognize an echo, a suggestion that obtruded itself through his very diffidence and for a fraction of time obliterated the factory and revealed him in a hitherto unimagined guise. She grew suddenly restless, and the muffled drone of machinery oppressed her. Pethick—the driver of men—would be out of place in France.

“That would be very nice,” she ventured. “So now— Good-by.”

The car slid down the street. The pressure of his fingers seemed like that of a claw, and he began to appear a part of the vast mechanism itself, a portion that had momentarily detached itself and would now merge again into that complex matrix. But would it? She dodged the possibility and, leaning back against the cushion, reflected with relief that, though Pethick had been in the factory for fifteen years, she had not spent fifteen minutes behind its barricade. Her father had singled him out and desired that he be kept in charge. Now that Pethick was her own employee, the factory had begun to weigh on her. It seemed at war with a spiritual existence of which she was slowly becoming conscious. It was commencing to grind out questions that she shirked. The case of Harrison was only one of many.

Two hours later a totally transformed Sylvia

smiled across the tea things. Kenneth was staring at her dejectedly. Through the window he could see her steamer trunk shining yellow on the running board of a motor car.

"Dear," she said reprovingly, "you're not weakening?"

He shook his head. "No, but I'm like the man in the Psalms; my bones have turned to water."

"You don't look very liquid."

"Sylvia—do you know we've only two hours more?"

She nodded silently and his hand found her own. "Busy day?" he asked.

"Packing—then the factory and Mr. Pethick."

"Did you settle about Harrison?"

"No! It would apparently upset things." She paused then exclaimed suddenly, "Oh—I'd like to sell the factory."

"You can't and you should n't."

"Why?"

He stirred his cup thoughtfully. "The Trust would buy it and they'd all probably have a worse time. Can't we talk about ourselves? I spoke to Dad to-day and he said I'd be up to five thousand next year. That's enough for any one to start on."

Her mind flashed back to the last balance sheet

of the factory. Chambers had explained it, and there was almost awe in his voice as he came to the profits. Now her lips quivered with suppressed mirth. "That 's more than enough for comfort."

"Perhaps it sounds a bit contemptible," he said doggedly, "but I 'm figuring as if you hadn't anything."

"I know you are—dear."

"You probably don't think it makes any difference—but it does—a lot to me." He stood looking down with decision on his handsome face. Then he drew her close.

"We understand—you and I—don't we? There 's something I want just as much as love—that 's self-respect, and if I can earn that in a year! Why—" He tilted her face. It was wet with tears.

"Kenneth—I—I don't want to go."

"It strikes me," he said, kissing her tenderly, "that perhaps it 's just as well. Don't you see? I 'll be able to do nothing but business—and I 'll do twice as much. It 's just a case of team work for both of us for the next few months."

The girl's lips trembled, but her gaze dwelt on him adoringly. He had all the vivid vitality and ambition of youth. The short, curly hair, the steady brown eyes, the strong, clean line from

brow to chin, the broad shoulders and peculiar erectness of him, filled her with a fortified sense that he would be a man amongst men. Into every mannerism and characteristic she read meanings and promises. She told herself a thousand times that he was made of some strange, potent material that held within it an ecstatic and magnificent element of love. She could never imagine him growing old. The thought of their marriage left her breathless.

"You 'll write often?" Her fingers were in his hair. The touch of it thrilled her—it seemed so tremendously alive.

"Twice a week. I 'll be working at night."

"You 'll be very wise when I come back—dearest."

He laughed. "Who else will you get letters from?"

"Mrs. Chambers, of course—and, oh— Mr. Pethick."

"What!"

"He sends a report every month. You don't mind that—do you?"

Kenneth glanced at her quizzically. "What 's Pethick like? I 've never seen him."

"What you are, he 's not. You would n't get on together at all, but I would n't worry about the factory if you were there."

“Would n’t you?” He looked at his watch, then his arms went out. “Beloved!”

For a moment thus. She was very pale, her eyes darkly luminous. His kiss had awakened something strange. A new Sylvia was alive and frightened her.

Quick, throbbing impulses surged through him, with promises that infinitely surpassed all his dreams. She was prophetic. “You ’re mine—mine!” She drew gently away and gazed at him. For one ineffable instant the veil had lifted and given each a blazing glimpse. Now it fell, but left them with a new consciousness of all that lay behind its mysterious folds.

CHAPTER II

THE Landon house was in Cottingham, two hours distant from Brunton, a smaller and mellower city that spread comfortably over a group of gently rolling hills. If it lacked the progress of Brunton, it lacked also the smoke and noise. Landon had for years resisted all temptations to remove to the metropolis, arguing that there was a side of his nature that shrank from the din of a multitude and found solace only in the shade of his own paternal maples. He clung to Cottingham also, because here he saw more of Kenneth. It was twenty-five years since he met and married the woman who so soon rebelled at his serenity and left him, bewildered, with his only son, but the poignant memory of her had become softened and the passing seasons only strengthened the bond between himself and the lad.

Of late, however, time had begun to hang somewhat heavily. He was conscious, as well, that to his son he presented the vision of a parent, affectionate and prematurely aged, who did nothing but walk in his garden or read for hours in his book-lined study. Kenneth's alertness and mental ap-

petite took on a faintly accusing tinge, but wherever Landon might look he saw only a competition from which he instinctively shrank, or a drab round of pursuit that seemed at variance with all his views of a rational and enjoyable life.

His diffidence was finally overcome by an advertisement. As a matter of fact he regarded all advertisements with suspicion, but in this case the phraseology was so dignified and the brief statement so moderate that, after a week's consideration, he wrote in a fine script-like hand that he would like further information regarding the very interesting announcement of Messrs. Kemp & Dobson, bankers and brokers of New York.

The reply came promptly. Kemp & Dobson made a practice of dealing only with gentlemen of repute and they would be glad to consider Mr. Landon's application to represent them in Cottingham in the sale of such gilt-edged stocks and bonds as they might from time to time have to offer.

The letter gratified him. Here, it seemed, was a business—no, a profession—to which he might devote such hours as he wished. He liked the phrase “as they might from time to time have to offer.” It suggested their recognition of the fact that all bonds were not gilt-edged. “They would be glad to consider his application.” They were

evidently cautious and in no haste. He began to tingle with a long dormant ambition, and in another month the thing was settled.

It was soon after this that Kenneth announced his engagement. Landon had been astonished. He had never met James Percival, but, like most others, knew of his achievements. When the first flush of this excitement was over, Kenneth's father analyzed his own affairs as never before. The result seemed insignificant. He had eight thousand a year from investments, and this, with a beautiful and unencumbered property, comprised the whole. Against it he put a surprisingly accurate guess at Sylvia's wealth and was queerly mortified at the comparison. Kenneth had said little about money, being too exalted for that, but his father's mind began to entertain uncomfortable pictures of Kenneth empty handed. The Landon pride was in arms. It was a comfort to know that he had a year to play with. Then, suddenly, he thought of Kemp & Dobson.

The result was a long and careful letter. It was essential that within the next few months Landon should make a considerable sum. What would they advise?

There followed a period that he found strangely harassing, being weighted with the self-imposed necessity of making money. His house, lands, and

investments took on new shape and meaning, and for the first time in his life presented themselves as possible agencies for gratifying his new ambition. Even Kenneth was regarded with an intensified affection; the son for whom he desired to do much. In the months that passed between the engagement and Sylvia's departure he sold stocks for Kemp & Dobson, accepting their statements without question and using every friend and acquaintance to widen his market. It was a season during which he was nervous and high-pitched. Then came his own opportunity.

The brokers suggested the stock of the Eastern Central, a short railway, connecting points on two great transcontinental lines, the management of which professed utter indifference as to its fate. The smaller company was apparently at their mercy. But insiders had it, so Kemp & Dobson stated, that so far from being disinterested each of the large railways was biding its time for an opportunity to purchase. When this took place the stock of the Eastern Central would rise perpendicularly. In conclusion, they wrote that a large block of this stock could be purchased at a very low figure if they were put in a position to act at once.

The letter gave Landon a day of intense reflection. He could buy two thousand shares outright.

He could liquidate his investments and raise a considerable sum. Walking for hours in his garden, he yielded ultimately to temptation, mortgaged his property, and sold all his securities except a small block that brought him two thousand a year. These transactions cut deep, but he only regarded Kenneth more affectionately than ever and said nothing. Within three months of the engagement he owned two thousand shares of Eastern Central outright and was carrying four thousand more on margin. Simultaneously the worm of anxiety began to bore into his brain.

With unwonted sensations of pride and apprehension he had gone to see Chambers, but it seemed that Chambers did not regard the engagement very seriously. For a man who was Sylvia's guardian and financial adviser, he appeared unusually unimpressed, and it flashed through Landon's mind that the lawyer possibly regarded the matter as by no means definitely settled. But behind Chambers's diffidence all his power of deduction were at work. He was wondering where Kenneth's vitality came from, to what strain was to be attributed the freemasonry of his manner and speech, and whether Landon senior, lacking his inherited means and position, would have had in him drive enough to create these things for himself. It may have been that some of this inward

questioning communicated itself to his visitor, for Landon went away vowing to demonstrate his own ability by a totally unexpected method. That afternoon he learned that some of the stock he had sold to Cottingham friends had not yielded the promised dividend. The week passed under a growing tension which no previous experience nerved him to face.

It was not till just before Sylvia's departure that Kenneth mentioned his own financial future. College course completed, he was now in a lawyer's office in Cottingham. He put the case baldly, making no request, then waited. They were pacing the garden, arms linked. It brought to Landon strangely fresh memories of other walks many years before.

"I know, my son, I know," he said affectionately. "It would be absurd to put it in any other way. I was going to tell you that I can run this place on five thousand. That will leave three over for you and bring you up to five thousand a year yourself. It is n't much, but it should enable you to provide for your personal needs. Chambers knows what you have; I told him. But I did not tell him that very soon you would have a good deal more." He smiled mysteriously, "That 's between ourselves."

"Just what do you mean, Dad?" Kenneth looked puzzled.

"I can't say anything else just now. By the way, are you going to live in Brunton?"

"Sylvia does n't want to. I don't like the idea of running away."

His father glanced at him quickly. "From what?"

"From the factory." A flush rose to Kenneth's cheeks. "It's none of my affair, but—"

"You don't expect Sylvia to take a hand in that, do you?"

"I don't know. It seems as though everything were taken out of the works and nothing put back. She's told me of some cases and they made me rather hot."

"If I were you I'd be very silent on that subject." Landon spoke with careful distinctness. "The factory supports thousands. It's a great creation of a wise man's brain and makes it possible for you to marry."

"It is n't on that account."

"I did n't say that. When you've seen a bit more you'll know a bit more, and these working people have their places—like ourselves. It would take a rash man to alter it. The surest way, my son, to achieve happiness is to confine one's inter-

ests to one's own sort; they understand and know what to look for. The others can't be expected to. When you marry all this will come home to you, and it's my fixed belief that the only safe way in life is to travel with one's own kind. I hardly think Chambers would approve of criticism of factory affairs, for from all I can hear they are in pretty strong hands." He rambled on with pleasurable visions of his son's future, to which he himself might not be able to contribute all he wished, but he could at any rate provide a paternal color admirably suited to Sylvia's means and position. He had, too, a comforting assurance that this was a marriage in which blood, the Landon blood, would tell.

Kenneth listened gravely, with a swift thought that perhaps there would not be many more talks like this. Of late he had yielded to a curious conviction that his father, however gentle and considerate, was nevertheless represented by nothing concrete in life. He was intangible, not to be measured by any personal interest or achievement, and had missed something which remained for his son to capture. And it may have been that in the love which Kenneth had for him there was a touch of wordless sympathy, too elusive for any actual expression.

Just then a messenger entered through the big

iron gate, and, seeing Landon, came to him, holding out a yellow envelope. Kenneth, with a sudden sense of discomfort, noted that his father snatched at it, and, reading hurriedly, thrust it, crumpled, into his pocket.

"It's all right. There's no answer." He turned to his son with assumed jauntiness. "It's too fine a day for business. What were we talking about?"

"I hope there's nothing wrong, Dad?"

"No—only a wire about some stock I bought the other day, a good buy too. It's down a point or so, but that's nothing—one can't expect to get in at the bottom every time. It's for you, old chap, like everything else."

Kenneth glanced at him anxiously. It was now generally known that Henry Landon was selling stock in Cottingham for Kemp & Dobson, also that some of these investments had proved disappointing. It was not suspected that he was plunging on his own account. His son ached to speak out but floundered between love and uncertainty.

"I hope it's all right, Dad, for your sake."

"Of course it's all right. The tide has to ebb now and again, but you'll be able to hold your end up. Leave it to me."

"I don't want anything more than you've already arranged for—and that's more than I im-

agined possible. You are not—" he hesitated—"not taking chances on my account?"

Landon smiled confidently. "Chance, not a bit of it. I only wonder that I've been blind to all this for so many years."

There was in his voice something so unconsciously and pathetically ambitious that Kenneth was silenced. In Landon's breast there had sprung up at last a variable spark, fanned into flame by pride for his son. But it was untended by experience, uncontrolled by previous loss. It was his own dear secret that when the day came Kenneth would be speechless and amazed, and on these unexpected laurels his father would retire into the placidity of his former life. With this in his mind he turned thoughtfully toward the house, then laid his hand on the lad's shoulder.

"Twenty four and the world in front of you! I can remember what it was to feel like that."

He walked off slowly, fingering the telegram in his pocket. Kemp & Dobson were calling peremptorily for more margin. With a sickening sense of helplessness, Landon realized that he was at the end of his resources. His property, mortgaged to its limit, could not be further squeezed, and he had a depressing conviction that he could not with any hope go to his friends for help. A year ago, three months ago even, this would have been natural

and efficacious, but of late he had detected a difference in his own standing as reflected from other people's eyes. It was the penalty of using an acquaintanceship with only the thought of his own advancement. He had read of the ruin of many men, but even now, with the inevitable moving implacably toward him, he thrust away the grim contemplation. There were too many others in the world on whom ruin could more naturally and suitably fasten. His face became drawn and haggard, and his hands stole to his cheek where a queer twitching had set up in the muscles. He rubbed at them nervously with a nameless fear.

Two days later, the day after Sylvia's departure, he sat late in his study poring over the financial sheet of an evening paper in which a column was devoted to Eastern Central. It pointed out with cold precision that the road had been a sink-hole for the shareholders' money, and that, from the first, operating expenses had rarely been covered by earnings. The stock, after being bolstered up for inside reasons, had dropped so precipitately that the curb called it wallpaper. A still further slump was predicted. He turned from this to Kemp & Dobson's curt and final letter, in which they stated that his margin being now entirely exhausted, they had had no alternative but to sell him out. They enclosed an account showing a

small balance still due him, and regretted that business procedure permitted of nothing else.

Somewhere in the house a clock struck ten, and Landon, feeling cold and weak, counted the strokes mechanically. The silence of his study became suddenly suffocating. For an instance he could not feel anything whatever and wondered dumbly if his heart had stopped beating. The twitching re-awoke in his face, and the corner of his mouth seemed to be pulled gently up. With an exclamation he forced it down, but it would not stay. A piteous appeal grew in his eyes. "Not that," he gasped under his breath, "not that!"

Rising with difficulty he crossed the room toward a bell on the wall. At that moment he heard the front door open and Kenneth's cheery voice. He reached desperately for the bell, but, just as he touched it, something snapped in his head with a sound like tearing cloth. The bell disappeared and he slid softly to his knees.

For Kenneth the next few hours passed as in a dream, and morning was gray when he flung himself on his bed in utter weariness of spirit and body alike. There was still a ray of hope. Landon might live, would probably live out the rest of his natural years, and somewhere in his stricken brain was a spark that might yet rekindle into intelligence. But still then he could only be the shell

of a man, physically alive but mentally inanimate, and who needed constant care. The tiny flame might yet evade them.

His son had turned exhausted to the desk and there found a record of the catastrophe. Letter and paper lay where the impotent fingers had left them, and the private ledger, in which the last entries were shaky, told the rest. These were poignant figures, eloquent of a rapt resolve to seize fortune almost over night. He could almost see his father leaning over them, his quiet glance kindled by an unnatural ambition. What was there, he wondered, half so pathetic as this brief history of failure in the hand of one to whom further misfortune was impossible.

Through it all moved the vision of Sylvia. It tortured him to realize that Landon had dared greatly that his son might not go empty handed. But if Sylvia loved him, what after all did money matter? Now, wrecked by vain desire, his father had accomplished the antithesis of his object. Were Sylvia poor, the thing had never happened. Kenneth pictured her sympathy with spontaneous affection.

Into this medley came a new conception that, stripped of whatever Henry Landon might have given, it was for him to prove himself single handed. The thought began to thrill, even in the

depth of dejection. Proof—that was it, proof of himself, and as much for himself as for Sylvia. His father had achieved no individual triumph, so that even in their most intimate moments there was always something parental that he himself missed. It came to him, also, that such a thing was not to be obtained by one prodigious effort but only by setting out into the world's current and holding his course no matter what wind or weather fate might send him. He grew slowly conscious of the universe calling to him, a universe composed of millions of men like himself, whose activities blended into a vast hurly-burly of effort, who made no allowances, but with countless calculations of time and tide dotted the seas of life with innumerable sails of rivalry and adventure. This spiritual expansion carried him breathlessly on. The way would be straighter than he ever had dreamed, but if he won through, as win he must, there would be that to offer Sylvia which had been proved by fire.

"I 'll be a man," he whispered; "a man!" and took out, one by one, the weapons of his soul.

In the next few days, much was accomplished. Henry Landon, moved to an invalids' home, lay with a pinch of sheet between his stiff fingers and a mocking semblance of intelligence in his eyes. There was saved from the wreck enough to pay

for his maintenance, all else being swept into the maw of the market. The Landon house was closed indefinitely and, hardest of all, Kenneth had first cabled, then written, to Sylvia. He gave her a fraction of the truth, and she was on no account to change her plans.

This done, he rented rooms, and sloughing off his old skin, ventured into that section of society which was most likely, he thought, to extend a helping hand. But society, having lent a ready ear to the gossip about Henry Landon, found no niche for his questing son. Kenneth stared at people he had known all his life, people who had shared the Landon bread and salt, and wondered vaguely at their chilling immobility, till he remembered that the shares of Kemp & Dobson were not all gilt-edged. At the end of a week, the thing was patent. He, too, was tarred with the brush of failure. Gradually, also, it became clear that there was a glut of brains and an open market for labor. He returned to his rooms disheartened and tossed restlessly every night.

During these days, also, he was conscious of a strange sense of transition. For the first time in his life he did not matter. He felt more than ever before the pulsing of the great human tide—but it was a tide that played with him—the flotsam of circumstance. It appeared that his past years

had been misdirected and pointless, in that the scheme of existence was so swiftly demoralized, and however he might close the doors of his soul there drifted into it strange promptings in which the brute that survives in man waked into something menacing and predatory. In this season he experienced a hunger for Sylvia, but no passion; his passion being one of protest against a society that visited the sins of the fathers upon the children. He had never thought much about religion but now began to attack it savagely, in that it permitted the existence of such conditions. The attitude of the world, he concluded, had ceased to be invitational and friendly, and was, instead, cold and suspicious. And just then he met Hickson.

It was in a cheap restaurant where, the first time Kenneth pushed his way to the counter, a girl behind it had smiled swiftly at him and heaped his plate full. At his elbow was a tall, cadaverous man finishing his meal. Kenneth watched with a curious fascination, while he cleaned his plate, sweeping up every atom of food with a skill that was eloquent. Then the restless eyes roved hungrily to more food. In them was a wolfish desire.

"Come on," said Kenneth impulsively, and motioned to the girl.

A dull red rose in the tall man's cheeks. An

oath was on his lips, when he caught the utter spontaneousness of the invitation. The bright, dark glance held his own for an instant.

Hickson hesitated. "Don't mind if I do," he said presently.

A few moments later he sat back contentedly. His gaze traveled unrestrainedly over his host. There was wisdom in it, hard won, bitter wisdom, and a certain uncomplaining grimness. "Hunting a job?" he ventured.

Kenneth nodded.

The tall man looked long and curiously at his companion's clothes. "Got a few minutes. Can you walk over to the Park?"

At that Kenneth nodded again, and the two, maintaining an awkward silence, made for a small square in the center of the town. Here, on a bench, the tall man stretched his legs and blinked patiently at the sputtering arc lamps.

"Hickson's my name, and you'll never get a job with those clothes on. Don't mind my saying so?"

Kenneth frowned. "What's the matter with them?"

"They make suspicion. Either a man who has clothes like that don't need a job, or else he has n't ever done any work and ain't worth anything. Reckon you ain't got any trade, eh?"

"No, I 've not." This with a laugh.

"I knew that anyway. Folks will just say they can't afford to have gentlemen working for them—sort of expensive experiment. Married, mebbe?"

Kenneth shook his head. "Not yet." The conversation had become grotesque, contradictory, and strangely suggestive all at a flash. He was sitting in a park given to the city of Brunton by old James Percival some years before his death. It was Percival's only public gift. Kenneth had glided through it with Sylvia in her motor and noted how grimy was the grass, how arduous an existence had the trees. It did not strike him then that it meant anything to anybody. But now it meant to himself a moment's rest, and fresh air, and a kind of roofless refuge in which he began to take a certain physical pleasure.

"I 'm night watchman in a factory near here, and work from seven to seven," Hickson's voice came in again. "Twelve dollars a week—had it for five years. My wife 's been sick for the last three, and that makes it hard going. Costs better than eight dollars a week to keep her, so I 've cut it pretty fine. Thing that bothers me is in case I lose my job—sort of expect it every night I go to work."

"It 's worth what you get, is n't it?" demanded Kenneth.

"It 's worth just what the boss can get it done for. Suppose some other fellow offers to do it for ten, it 's his job and I 'm out, and if he has n't got a wife, why should n't he?" Hickson spoke with grim and hard-bitten certitude.

After that followed a pause. Presently his voice came in again. "I guess you 've never had a job, so you don't know anything about the fear of losing one."

"That 's right, but I 've got to have one now."

"Then get some other clothes, understand? You 've got to look like work if you want it."

"But it is n't a laboring job I 'm after."

"Oh!" Hickson drew in perceptibly. Watching him, Kenneth had a swift impression that he had nearly been accepted by this man, but now had automatically shifted himself to another plane. He felt that between them was a dividing line which could only be obliterated by some common interest, hazard, or danger. He perceived, too, that he himself was attempting to occupy some middle sphere between capital and labor, since he lacked both capital and the readiness to face physical toil. To Hickson he must appear weak and parasitic.

"Guess I 'd better move on." The watchman

rose, stretching himself, his long body outlined sharp against the light. "Some night, if you 've nothing doing, take a walk with me through the works; they 're different to daytime. Seems like there 's a ghost at every machine that steps back when the lantern shows up, and I don't know but what the machines get as tired as the men—they shape up that way every now and then." He moved off, chuckling quietly at his own thoughts. A few yards away he stopped. "Look here," he added over his shoulder, "don't you get down-hearted if it seems sometimes as though you did n't matter much. You 'll get used to that if you 're hunting a job—we all get used to it, and then it don't hurt like the first time. Mebbe I 'll see you to-morrow."

In after years Kenneth's mind constantly pitched back to the hour that followed. Hickson vanished in the dust toward the factory that awaited his lonely and faithful patrol, but left behind him something that moved restlessly in the young man's soul. Hickson, after all, was but partially right. Kenneth did matter. A few blocks away was the Chambers' house. Five minutes walk and the pressure of a button, this only was needed to change the color of the world. Love, sympathy, and luxury were all to be had for the stretching out of a hand.

Strangely enough the consciousness did not move him. He felt, instead, like a child who, straying from his nurse, is regarded by the innumerable and callous eyes of a multitude that glances at him indifferently and passes on. Came then in a succession of slow waves the perception that there were millions of others who mattered less—infinately less than himself, and had accepted the fact with mute recognition of its truth. Hickson did n't really matter, nor did those others who now began to populate the park, reclining languidly on the scattered benches, luxuriating in the slack and shrouded hours that were stealing soft-footed across the city.

There slid into Kenneth's brain the question whether he had not come by an unimagined course to the parting of the ways. To Sylvia it would all be grotesque and outrageous. He perceived that his present mental conflict was something she could never understand. The fact that she could not understand it seemed to put her in a new light, since never before had he questioned her ability to comprehend. Hickson, for instance, was very real to him, but could Hickson and his kind ever be real to Sylvia. To his own dismay he discovered presently that instead of holding Sylvia close as something to be worshiped and kept from all things rough, grim, and depressing, he was an-

alyzing her capacity for pity and insight. At that he felt traitorous and turned toward his room, passing the Chambers' house on the way, glancing at it quizzically, as though here was that with which he could play if he chose. But, he decided, he would not choose till to-morrow.

Morning found him in a curious exaltation. He was waiting, somehow, to see Hickson again; Hickson who had drifted toward him, an ambassador of a nebulous kingdom, bringing with him strange suggestions and the unadorned wisdom of experience. The day passed with a certain breathlessness. Once in the distance he saw Chambers and instinctively stepped out of sight. He was not ready for Chambers yet. In fact, he admitted, he might never be ready for him. At six o'clock he went back to the restaurant and found Hickson already there. With a sharp glance at the lean face, Kenneth took the stool beside him.

The night watchman was eating slowly, but apparently not tasting the food. His eyes, dull and curiously glassy, were fixed on the opposite wall with an unwinking stare; his jaws, moving methodically, were so thin that they revealed every bony articulation. He made a clucking noise in his throat as Kenneth seated himself, then, pushing away his half-finished portion, turned quickly

around and, with a swift glance of invitation, stepped to the door.

Five minutes later, in James Percival's Park, he told his story. The other man, the ten-dollar man, had come along and got the job. Hickson said this very quietly, and with no accusations for the other man who, he thought, had only done what was natural.

"But what about you?"

The long fingers began to twist. "That 's what all of us have to ask, what about me—and what about my wife?"

Kenneth was silent, till again the voice came in steadily. "It 's just as I told you; labor is worth what you can get it for. Mind, I don't blame the boss so much either. In a way he 's only trying to protect himself; at least he thinks he is. Of course he might have kept me on, but that would be only—" the watchman hesitated and the clucking noise sounded again.

"Yes?"

"The crumbs from the rich man's table, and, by God!" he flared out, "I don't want crumbs. I only want what I 've earned. My wage should be enough to pay my way." He shot a quick glance at his companion. "Ever think of these things?"

"Not much," admitted Kenneth under his breath, "but now—"

“That ’s it”—Hickson stared straight into the blinding center of an arc lamp so that its white rays explored his anxious eyes to an extraordinary depth—“because up to now you ’ve never had to. The world is full of folks who could help put things right but they don’t, because they don’t have to. As for myself I don’t care so much, but my wife ’s got to be kept going, and that means eight dollars a week.”

Instantly there recurred the thought of Sylvia, with her spontaneous and casual generosity, but a glance at Hickson’s face showed the futility of the idea. Kenneth thought, too, of a certain Brunton charity, till the other, as though reading him, went on grimly.

“It ’s conditions, I know that, and you can’t lay the whole blame on any one employer. Some of ’em are all right. Folks may say that men are born equal, but that don’t work so long as one side has to take what the other side is willing to give. I can send my wife as a charity patient to the Brunton Hospital, but what ’s she done to drive her to take charity, and what have I done—now you tell me that?” He leaned round and twisted his lean face in which the muscles began to twitch. “For all I know you may be one of those investigators that take a sort of week’s trip into the working class and then write books about the labour

problem, but let me tell you you don't learn much so long as you 've got it in your head that the trip will soon be over, and then you 'll go back where you came from."

"It is n't that," said Kenneth, huskily; "believe me, it is n't."

"Well"—the harsh voice softened a little—"I 'll believe you all right, for, God knows, I want to believe something to-night. You do care, honest?"

The young man nodded jerkily.

"Then I 'll tell you something. When you 've worked hard and done your best and lost your job; when you 're heartsick and used up and don't know which way to turn; and when you don't see anything ahead of you but more work, just so long as you look for it, and when you feel that you, and all the rest like you, don't count and won't ever count until you damned well take what you 're entitled to, then you 'll be getting under the skin of what the investigator calls the labor problem."

He rose stiffly, "I guess I 'd better be getting on; don't want to be late the last week. Good luck—mebbe I 'll see you again."

Kenneth felt within him a surge of savage protest. He wanted to shout to Hickson to come back, and he would tell him everything and put things right. But just then he was suddenly and

strangely convinced that he must be concerned not with Hickson but with himself. Later on the watchman might be taken care of. In the meantime he must face a certain question that came to him quite distinctly through the softened hum of the city. Sylvia was involved in it, and Sylvia's factory, and Kenneth himself, and the future of all three. Later he would marry Sylvia and take a hand in her affairs and deal, in all probability, with just such cases as that of Hickson. But what would he do with them? This moved uncomfortably in his mind, till Hickson began to appear to him not so much as a man out of a job as a sort of uncommissioned envoy from a land which Kenneth would soon have to explore. He seemed, indeed, not a watchman at all, but something austere and epic and in no way to be evaded.

From this the young man's imagination traveled back to the day of his engagement, when he resolved to make something out of himself, a sort of votive offering of worthiness. Five thousand a year was the mark. But now, even when the five thousand had vanished, it seemed incongruous that he should have matched money against money, however disproportionately. There was still the year of opportunity, less one week. At that the brown eyes of Sylvia came before him, signaling imperatively that though the year was his

in which to do as he pleased, she would come back at the end of it and lift him out of the rut of uncertainty and loneliness. How foreign she was to all this. The thought lingered with him until she began to appear almost too foreign. Finally he remembered what she had said about her own factory. She did n't understand it, and it frightened her. Then she had added that she would n't worry about the factory if he were there. A moment later he was surprised to hear his own voice.

"Why should n't I be there?" it repeated.

At this all his former breathlessness returned with redoubled intensity. Why should n't he? He had never seen Pethick, but now pictured him with surprising accuracy. Pethick, he decided, would be rather startled, but would make room with the best grace he could, and after that Kenneth could probe for the reason of things. But just as this took on a most inviting aspect, Hickson, or the wraith of Hickson, reappeared and assured him earnestly that the scheme would n't do. There was only one alternative. Pethick must not know who he was, nor should any one else in the factory. He must work, and indeed be like the rest of them, and if he put his very spirit into the thing, his spirit would emerge at the end of the year armed with the wisdom of the ranks, the wisdom that dallies not over visionary ideals

but cleaves straight to the heart of the greatest of all modern problems. It would hurt—he was further told—and he would have to play the game, but the game was worth it.

The hour dragged out, and another. He sat quite motionless while the park filled with its nightly inhabitants. A policeman sauntered through, swinging his club, glancing indifferently at the slack figures on the benches. They were very quiet.

Presently Kenneth rose and began to walk rapidly. Passing the Chambers' house he smiled grimly at the door he was about to close against himself. At a second-hand store he paused long enough to buy working clothes; and, with a bundle under his arm, hastened on. As he reached his rooms utter exhaustion overtook him and, dropping limply on the bed, he instantly fell asleep.

Next morning, he discovered that dressing took but a fraction of the usual time; then, by side streets, he made for the factory of the Consumers' Rubber Company and stood for a while staring at the high, dingy brick wall. The place looked like a fortress, towering story upon story, in successive flights of small, bleared windows. From inside, a dull rumble throbbed unceasingly, through which he made out the voices of individual machines that, in a confusion of pitch and key,

blended into a deep diapason of force. The office, cleaner than the rest but equally bare and uncompromising, was in a separate building, backed up against the others. Across the front was a heavy iron railing, polished bright by innumerable loungers. A sign hung at the door, "Men Wanted."

Kenneth chuckled. "Now for Pethick." He took the steps three at a time.

Inside was a bench on which half a dozen men were sitting. They appeared not to see him. He hesitated and took the place nearest the door. A boy blinked through a glass partition immediately opposite, then came round, surveyed the group casually and crooked his finger. The nearest man rose languidly and followed, while the others slid automatically up the bench. Presently the man came out looking contemptuous and supercilious with his head up. He strolled away with assumed jauntiness. The others went through the same manœuvre. They were looking for work, but apparently did not want it. The last one turned as he crossed the threshold and shook his head. "Keep out of it," he signalled.

The boy appeared again and jerked his chin. Kenneth grinned and followed close behind him. They passed through an outer office into one which was carefully protected from noise or in-

trusion. Across a flat topped desk a sharp-featured, thin, ageless man regarded Kenneth keenly. His eyes dropped to the applicant's hands.

"Ever do manual work before?" he rapped out.

Kenneth had a wild desire to laugh. "No," he hesitated—"sir."

Pethick noted the breadth of shoulder, then scanned the smooth, young face from beneath lowered lids. His stare was hooded like a falcon's. "What is your name?"

"My name is—oh—John Anderson." The lad's cheeks began to burn.

"Took you sometime to remember it—eh?" Pethick smiled coldly.

"I'm not often asked it," countered Kenneth.

The ghost of the smile flickered back and trembled on the manager's narrow lips. "Probably it was n't necessary before." There was just the least lift in the voice. It was provocative, and achieved something more than a suggestion of sarcasm.

Kenneth pressed his finger tips into his palms and said nothing. Tuned up for this, he would see it through. Pethick swung in his chair and scribbled on a pad. Then he looked up again.

"You want work—actually?"

"Yes."

"You never ran machinery?" The query an-

swered itself automatically as though such a possibility were absurd.

"No—except a motor." The lad bit his lip. He had not meant to say that.

"Yes—I know." The tone was impersonal with a touch of diffidence, but Kenneth felt that he did know.

"Well—I'll give you a chance. Wages one dollar and a half to start with, and the rest depends on yourself."

"What machinery am I to run?"

"None to begin with—but when you do, take care of your hands." He touched a bell. "Take —" he paused deliberately—"take John Anderson to the storeroom and tell Peters to put him on." Kenneth caught a glance as he turned to go. It scrutinized, mocked, conjectured—but he could not tell which was uppermost.

The boy beckoned impertinently and Kenneth followed to a counter where lay a pile of printed cards. "My name is Anderson—John Anderson," he reflected, and wrote in a slow and careful hand. So, across a court yard and into the factory. He began to take to his name; it sounded like that of a skilled mechanic. The wages seemed ridiculous. With an extraordinary sensation he realized that it was Sylvia's money.

CHAPTER III

PETERS, foreman of the crude rubber department, was short and dark, with a swart skin that somehow made one think of the jungle. His black, oily eyes roved constantly along the vista of bins in which the rubber was piled. These, filled with dusty heaps and placarded with queer tropic-sounding names, exuded sharp, acrid, smoky smells that spoke of palms and lagoons, and heightened the illusion. It seemed a place of shadow and soft suggestion in which one might hear the rap of a native's paddle against the edge of his dug-out or the swish of silky fur beneath a giant fern. Peters, perhaps, had recognized this, so quietly did he pad, pad down his opulent alley.

He received the new hand without interest or comment, and set him at entering weights in a notebook. The stuff was worth one dollar a pound, and they worked to ounces. The rumble of machinery hardly penetrated here, but a constant vibration rose from the cement floor and throbbed like a delicate pulse through the framework of the building.

The morning hours lagged, and Kenneth was

faint with hunger when the whistle blew. Joining the tide, he came at the end of a long, jostling whiplash of humanity to the timekeeper's office. The line hurried through, accompanied by the sharp staccato of a bell that rang continuously—actuated by keys. These were thrust into the time-clock by strong fingers and withdrawn and hung on a numbered hook. A potent thing this clock, by which men acquitted or condemned themselves.

The tide flowed into the street and ebbed rapidly. Kenneth stood alone and irresolute—then walked back to the timekeeper.

“Do you know a room I can get near here?”

The man lit his pipe and spat with deliberation. “Folks 'round here don't like boarders. Guess you 'll have to go cross town.”

“How far is it?”

“'Bout three miles. 'T ain't that—it 's the car fare.”

“Car fare—why—that 's only—” he checked himself abruptly. On wages of nine—no—eight dollars and seventy-five cents a week—Saturday being a half day—car fare was a consideration. It would be sixty cents a week—the price of a golf ball. The time-keeper eyed him curiously.

“Perhaps you can stand it,” he said sardonically. “I can't.”

Kenneth laughed. "No, I can't either. I'd be obliged," he added frankly, "if you could tell me of anything."

He pondered, and at that moment a big man with broad, bent shoulders and a yellow beard walked slowly through the office—rang—and hung up his key.

"Hold on, Sohmer; here's a new hand wanting a room. You've got one, haven't you?"

The man looked 'round and stared studiously. Kenneth saw a wide, fair brow, a large nose slightly aquiline, full red lips masked beneath a tawny mustache, and large, calm, pale blue eyes. Their expression was extraordinarily benignant.

"A room—yes, I have a room." The deep voice had a mellow rumble.

"Well, here's a fellow that wants one; you can fix it up with him." The timekeeper jerked his chin at Kenneth.

Into the blue eyes came a flicker of amusement. "Perhaps this room you would not like," he said slowly. "It is small and four and one-half dollars a week." He seemed almost indifferent whether it were taken or not.

But the new hand had begun to feel very much alone, and of all the men he had seen this one stood out like a friendly lighthouse. "I'll take it," he answered impulsively.

The kindly face wreathed itself in smiles. "Eh, what! But the room you have not yet seen. Is it not better to look? Come with me—so, it is close."

They walked down the street together, Sohmer chatting amiably, with curious glances in which an unusual interest was genially mingled. His house, two blocks distant, was a rectangular wooden box behind a minute and immaculate lawn, in which every blade of grass seemed to occupy its appointed place. The small windows glistened, and there were flowers on the sills. As Sohmer entered the narrow hall, the smell of dinner drifted out. His bulk filled the place when he strode out to the kitchen.

"Little mother," he boomed softly, "come here!"

A small, deep-bosomed woman appeared, fair like Sohmer, with the same pink skin and blue eyes. She seemed supremely energetic and competent. Her face and neck were shining with moisture, suggesting a creature of food and strength, a maternal and sensible soul who might care for a nation. She looked keenly at Kenneth.

"The room, yes; it is upstairs. Please come."

He followed with a glance at spotless walls and floors, where the paint was worn thin with continuous cleansing. On his left as he mounted was

the parlor—not garish, he noted, but extraordinarily small, where a man of Sohmer’s bulk could hardly be accommodated. The bedroom, which the little woman showed him with quiet pride, was a pigmy cube, also immaculate. The one window opened on the back yard, where was more grass and a vine-covered trellis, and beyond this the rear of another row of tiny houses baking in the sun. He could see the life of the neighbors. It struck him as unnaturally intimate and close, but it was only the intimacy of necessity. He caught the little woman’s glance appraising him steadily, and holding, he thought, something more than a reflection as to his ability to pay.

“It is very nice indeed,” he smiled, “I would like to take it.”

“It is four and one-half dollars,” she said passively. “For less one cannot do it and give good food.”

“But that seems very little.” He had been trying to fathom how any one could feed and house a man for so insignificant a sum, till, with a strange sensation, he realized it was half his wages.

Mrs. Sohmer looked surprised. “So! Many have told me it was too much. But you are satisfied, yes?” Again that curious glance rested upon him.

“I am glad to get it.”

Sohmer put his head out of the kitchen as they came downstairs. "Is it all right, my friend? Your name I do not know."

"Yes, thank you. My name is John Anderson."

"Ah! And you will come when, Anderson?" The big man seemed to linger a little on the last word.

"To-night, if it 's convenient."

Sohmer spoke to some one Kenneth could not see. "Yes, to-night; it will be all right." There was a smile on his lips, and the blue eyes were kindlier than ever.

Moving in after supper, Kenneth sat up late writing to Sylvia. It was so difficult to put what he felt on paper, that after a few ineffectual efforts he gave it up. He was on the edge of a new country and could not picture what was yet unexplored. Something warned him inwardly against revealing either his occupation or his object; the transition was too abrupt, and he knew enough of Sylvia's impulsive nature to imagine the result. He began to perceive that in these austere surroundings he might discover a new strength, tangible and elemental, that would pull him through, and that whatever Sylvia's presence and sympathy might do for him, it could never pitch his spirit to so high a point of endeavor as he determined would be evidenced in the man, John

Anderson. It was for John Anderson to make good, till, armed with hard-won knowledge, Kenneth Landon emerged from the chrysalis of labor, fitted by grim experience to carry his appointed burden. This, and not the wealth for which his father had bartered his too-ambitious brain, would be his equipment. So it came that in the letter was only the guarded news that he had secured a most interesting job and through it would acquire valuable experience. He closed and stamped it with a sigh. But the washstand made after all an admirable desk.

At half-past five came a knocking at the door. He stretched his stiff body, jumped out of bed, dressed hurriedly and came down to the kitchen. A girl was at the table.

"My daughter," said Sohmer with a certain ponderous dignity. "Greta, shake hands with Mr. Anderson."

The girl rose with vivid blushes that crept to the roots of her thick, flaxen hair. Her skin was marvelously white, her eyes blue like her parents' but with darker depths in which quick lights were born and died swiftly. Her full round figure was eloquent of strength, her breast curved royally beneath a thin cotton blouse, and her lips were scarlet. More delicate than her mother and more alert than her father, she seemed to be nature's

compromise between the two, and moved with an easy grace which bridged the gap that a generation had dug between them.

Sohmer was hungry and preoccupied, speaking briefly to his wife, who alternated briskly from stove to table. He took no further notice of the younger people. Greta was embarrassed, eating little and glancing at Kenneth with preoccupied eyes that, to his fancy, discerned the man who was not John Anderson.

Fixing his attention on his food, he was nevertheless conscious of a wordless potency that emanated from her. The room, the whole house, felt somehow smaller than ever. He finished his meal silently with a curious sensation of intrusion.

Within the next few days, Kenneth began to make strange discoveries. The men regarded him with frank suspicion. He had no insignia of labor—none of those nameless symbols of the brotherhood of toil without which he could claim nothing hereditary that they would accept. But with Sohmer he felt curiously at home—Sohmer, it appeared, could see on both sides of the fence. Walking home he voiced a protest.

“Yes,” said the big man judicially; “that you must expect.”

“But they seem not to trust me.”

“So—that one can also understand. If you,

my friend, had worked since you were a small—a very small boy—and worked hard, and one day you saw beside you a man who had never worked—you would feel the same.”

There was a strange, almost prophetic note in the voice. Kenneth’s mind turned to Sylvia. Her image always floated before him, but latterly it seemed to be growing more remote. A nebulous cloud was drifting across it, through which he could hear the whispering of a multitude. He glanced at Sohmer, and it struck him again how poised, how armed for the conflict of his life, was this man.

“What countryman are you?” he said involuntarily.

“All countries are mine.” It was almost as though Sohmer were talking to himself, so gentle were the tones, so charged with sudden profundity of thought.

“Yes—?” There was an interrogating lift in the word.

“When one has wandered one has learned.” The big man’s eyes seemed shrouded with poignant memories. “Also one has sometimes to leave the things one loves for the sake of the things one respects. I am free here—in Canada.” He paused and added deliberately. “My spirit I shall rule myself.”

Kenneth glanced at him again. "Somehow I can't think of you as a working man," he burst out impetuously.

This time, Sohmer smiled. "When we know each other better, we shall talk of those things—perhaps. As for the men, if you can listen without talking, you will learn much."

The lad bit his lip, but the advice sank deep. It was still in his mind when he was abruptly moved into the rubber washing-room. Sanders was the new foreman. Greta had spoken of Sanders, and Kenneth saw a tall, dark, nervously restless man whose active figure was in constant motion. He walked with lithe undulations that suggested a panther, and his own section of the factory might indeed have been a cage, so barren was it of everything save iron, steel, and concrete.

The floor was streaming with water. Just beneath it turned a great shaft. This was connected by cogwheels to the mills, in each of which two massive, polished cylinders revolved toward each other, their smooth, glistening surface impelled by an invisible but inflexible power. Their very smoothness fascinated him. He peered into the narrow crack that separated their adamantive curves. They suggested a mechanical maelstrom into which, if a man be drawn, he perished. A whole battery of mills was in operation, and Ken-

neth fancied he saw a dozen escapes from mutilation in a minute.

Sanders touched him on the shoulder and strode to another part of the room. "Watch me."

In front of him lay a long trough with slots in the bottom at equal distances. Into one of these he dropped a lump of rubber, and holding it in place with one hinged lever, pressed another with his foot. As he did so a dripping saw swung up through the slot and gnawed slowly into the tough mass. A stream of water played on it constantly. Presently it hissed through and automatically dropped back.

"That's your job," said Sanders. "Let me see you do it."

In a few moments he grunted. "You 'll do, but mind your hands."

Kenneth nodded. He dared not take his eye off the operating lever toward which his foot seemed to move without volition.

"You 're boarding with Sohmer—ain't you?" The voice was a little truculent and carried the suggestion that it would be as well not to deny it since the thing was known.

"What 's that to you?"

Sanders stepped a little closer. "I 'm askin' you."

"And I 'm answering you," snapped Kenneth. His fingers began to tingle.

Some one laughed behind him, and the foreman swore viciously.

"Get on with your work." He had flushed to the roots of his black hair.

Kenneth turned to the machine. Close to it revolved a mill at which stood a small man in whose pale cheeks burned spots of color. He seemed a delicate wisp of humanity beside those relentless cylinders.

"Glad you spoke up," he said. "There ain't enough of that here. Sanders's job has got to his head and he 's a hell of a foreman."

Kenneth hesitated, then stooped, and dropped a lump of rubber into the trough.

"Say," went on the other, "the trick of that machine is to press the lever with your left foot, not the right. Makes you stop and think a minute. See?"

"That's so. Thank you. I 'm rather a fool at this."

"The fellow as knows he 's a fool ain't in no particular danger. The last man there knew it all, an' cut his hand off."

Kenneth set his teeth as the whirring saw flashed up, and, biting deep embedded itself in the lump

that swarthy hands had fabricated in the forests of Brazil. It began to appear that there was a strange drama here, in which invisible savages had played the first act and then slid out of sight to make way for a modern factory. The quivering mass in front of him seemed still to vibrate with mysterious and humid life, ere it should be flattened between Perry's immutable rolls. He looked again at the little man, who stood with soaking feet in a shallow pool of water. Consumptive, plainly—with the hectic flush and the short breath and the emaciated neck. How much of his life had he watched being crushed out before his eyes?

Presently he noticed that the others always helped Perry when they could. They lifted what was too heavy for him, and when the groaning rolls became covered with a sticky blanket and he failed to strip them, there was always assistance without the asking. He seemed to be somehow transitory, a toiling bird of passage that had stayed over night.

"How long have you been here?" ventured the new hand.

"Twenty years."

"But I mean here in this room."

"Twenty years," said Perry. "I started with old man Percival."

"But—but what about the future?" stammered

Kenneth. This man had taken his post in this damp, steaming room soon after he himself was born.

Perry laughed mirthlessly. "Where do you come from that you ask about the future?" He held a hand over the gleaming metal. "Life is just like that—going between the rolls again and again." Then he added with a peculiar emphasis, "While it lasts."

There was that in his voice which held the listener mute. A great, brown sheet dropped from between the cylinders. Perry deftly lifted an end and pushed it forward, till the untiring metal grabbed it and instantly the pressure came on.

"You look different," he continued, "and I guess you are. I don't suppose you wonder what it would be like to roll home in your car every night after watching other people work for you."

"Even if I didn't—could you do without such people?"

Perry glanced at him sharply. "Guess I'm barkin' up the wrong tree." He relapsed into silence.

Kenneth flushed and bent over his own machine. Again he remembered that Sylvia had said that the factory frightened her. He began to see why.

A dull drabness settled upon him with recurrent days. He tried to cast this off by cheery letters

to Sylvia. It was not time to hear from her yet. Not by the remotest inference did he reveal his own location. But writing till late, till the lights were extinguished all down the road in which the Sohmer house maintained its impeccable neatness, he wondered whether after all he had ever wholly grasped her dainty desirableness. Odds and ends of memories, words, phrases, looks, mannerisms and gestures, crowded in on him with an overwhelming appeal. That he should have held her in his arms, that her lips should have rested on his own, that their gaze should have uncovered mutual fountains of adoration—all this seemed remote and unreal, with Sylvia ghostlike and intangible, leaving behind her only the benediction of caresses; with his father lying inert while the fettered brain struggled for the light, with the conflict he himself had dared, waiting him on the morrow. Life had resolved itself into a grim conundrum for which as yet he could find no answer.

Through all of this he was constantly aware of the steady gaze of Greta. At first it puzzled him. She was very fair, and expressed a certain maturity of youth, which, with her broad, deep bosom and patient eyes, proclaimed her as born to bear and rear children. There was too, at rare intervals, a fleeting glimmer that for an instant transformed her into something terrific and potential.

She was one of those women who, displacing from their consciousness all except the ultimate object, attain it, not so much by effort as by a superb indifference to all else. Such individualities are unmoved even by desire, for they are the incarnation of desire itself.

A glimpse of the truth came when, noting the invariable order of his room, he had asked whom he was to thank for an attendance not in any way paid for by four and a half dollars a week. The girl's lips began to tremble, and, pressing her hand to a suddenly heaving breast, she rushed away in confusion. She said not a word, but for a fraction of time the curtain of her soul was lifted.

And at this all his self-questions returned anew. Above the roar of the factory floated Sylvia. She would, if she only knew, be sorry for Greta, sorry for them all, and would put things right. This could be accomplished in a month if he would only bury his decision and, casting off the garb of John Anderson, step forth himself again. But always as the invitation seemed more alluring he felt stirring within him a sense of something imminent and predestined. He recognized it now as a voice that had whispered in the quieter moments of former days. It urged insistently that it was the only thing to follow—that it represented the elemental part of himself, the part that must turn away

from the easy method and from the flesh-pots, and diligently pursue some high and as yet undetermined issue.

On Saturday afternoon, Mrs. Sohmer asked him to go shopping with Greta and carry her basket.

CHAPTER IV

SYLVIA'S cablegram, despatched hastily, when she received Kenneth's first letter three days after landing in England, reached Mr. Chambers at the breakfast table. By this time, the ripple of excitement caused by Henry Landon's illness had smoothed out into an occasional query as to what Kenneth was doing. At the nursing home they said that the lad had come on Sunday, then vanished. More than this was not known, but Chambers was reassured to find that the invalid's expenses were paid for months in advance.

He had sent the news to Sylvia with what details he could gather, but the cablegram contained no reference to his letter. In some perplexity he read it aloud.

"What's the matter with that boy?" he grumbled. "Here's a pretty girl with a hundred thousand a year looking for him."

His wife contemplated her tea cup with outward calmness, but in reality her long modulated spirit was on fire with imagination. Into that mundane round in which she had moved with such negative acceptance, there now obtruded itself something supremely unconventional, not to be measured by

any preconceived or smooth-worn method, something new and suggestive which might rearrange the drab pattern of her existence and establish an unexpected angle of vision. For the moment this possibility possessed her. She considered not Sylvia or Kenneth, but herself. The thought gave her a delicious thrill. She put it carefully away in an inner locker of sensibility and looked cheerfully at her husband.

"You know I had mixed feelings about Kenneth. It seemed to me as though Sylvia were a bit of very rare, carefully grown fruit and he just sauntered along and picked it. I don't believe that he was ready to appreciate her—and it's just possible that he knows it—and—"

"I have n't noticed any rush of modesty about him," said Chambers, cynically.

"If there were n't something of that kind you 'd know all about him by now. Why should he stay away?"

"Pride, disappointment—anything you like."

"I've a strong suspicion," she answered firmly, "that that young man is beginning to see things as they really are and has decided to play his own game."

"Possibly, but is there any reason why he should play it in the dark?" Chambers was, as a matter of fact, somewhat impressed.

"I don't think he 'd do anything to lessen his chances." There was a touch of introspection in her voice.

"Hm— Well, since he 's penniless, he 'll hardly expect to marry her."

"Expect! Of course he will. What has that got to do with it?" Mrs. Chambers had divested herself of domesticity and sat with ruffled feathers and a new light in her eye.

Her husband started, then pulled himself together, and surveyed her with considerable astonishment. He had, it appeared, rediscovered his wife, but her latest personality was invested with a certain distinction he had not noted before. Simultaneously he was seized with the desire to explore it. She met him, however, with a glance so suddenly bright, a perception so patently keen, that for the moment he decided to examine the joints of his own armor. The lists were always open for his entrance.

"I shall have to cable," he said reflectively. "It 's a matter for a private detective."

"Jackson—please don't do that. Wait a day or two." She had a vision of Kenneth's curly hair and laughing eyes. The thought of a detective revolted her.

"Why wait?" he laughed good naturedly. He had meant to wait in any case.

"Because something 's going to turn up. I feel it in my bones, and I have n't felt anything there for years."

He got up and put his hand on her shoulder. "Bertha—you surprise me."

"I surprise myself. The car is waiting for you. Send it back for me, please."

During the next half hour she was ostensibly arranging her household day, but this duty had become so sempiternal that it consisted only of a series of words and gestures which she found herself carrying out with no inward consciousness of action. The big, underlying fact was that romance was born again. Sometimes in her breast there had flushed a spark of maternal passion, but despite other endowments she was robbed of that possessive fury which animates the mother. Her husband, though communicable and infinitely kind, was nevertheless emotionally arid. When old James Percival asked her to befriend his daughter, she had snatched the girl to her childless bosom and invested her with the aura of daughterhood. Into this union Kenneth projected himself with a confident flair that compassed her fortifications and invaded the sanctuary, as it were over night. From the shock she was recovering with a certain silent and superb self-sacrifice. But neither Sylvia nor Kenneth had guessed that.

Now the curtain lifted to reveal a novel and fascinating scene. Even before Sylvia left, Bertha Chambers had begun to want Kenneth to marry her, just because Sylvia herself had wanted it. That Henry Landon's illness should not only rob the girl of a lover but should also render necessary her own self-immolation, was too preposterous to think of. She had prepared for the offering and had not the slightest intention of climbing down from the altar and allowing the sacrificial flame to flicker out. She experienced, as well, a touch of destiny. Her fingers, long inanimate, began to feel the tangled threads of life. The pulse of them warmed her. To find Kenneth was very simple; she would go and do it.

Later that day, she motored home through the factory district. The streets were alive with people, and the car moved slowly past rows of stores. Men clustered at the corners. There was a general air of heartiness and relief. Factory girls walked arm in arm with giggling acknowledgments to male friends who turned to look after them. Platforms and boxes of fruit invaded the pavement, at which one stopped, fingered, pinched, and bought.

The car slowed down behind a loaded dray, and Bertha Chambers, glancing ahead, saw the back of a tall, straight youth. He carried a basket. Be-

side him was a girl whose flaxen hair escaped luxuriantly from beneath her hat.

Mrs. Chambers gasped with surprise, then leaned back and put her mouth to the speaking tube. The chauffeur nodded—and with a deft twist sent the car alongside the dray, drew sharply ahead, and slid up against the curb a few yards on.

Mrs. Chambers, with a pink spot in either cheek, put her head out of the window. The two were nearly abreast.

“Kenneth Landon,” she said sharply, “come here.”

For an instant she was conscious of the girl rather than the youth. She had a glimpse of wide, blue, startled eyes, a fair skin that flushed crimson—a hand that involuntarily went out and rested on her companion’s arm. Kenneth stepped forward and took off his cap.

Mrs. Chambers did not speak for a moment. She noted that he looked well and strong and somehow older, but yet not older. The ghost of a smile was on his lips and his gaze met her steadily. She glanced into the basket. It was half full of vegetables.

“What is this nonsense?” Her voice trembled, and she had the sensation of having jumped over the footlights on to the stage.

"It is n't nonsense," he spoke quite cheerfully.

"It's a perfect masquerade. Sylvia cabled about you to-day. You're not fair to her."

"Don't," he said under his breath; "she'll hear about it by the next mail. I'm doing the best I can."

"Where are you working?" Mrs. Chambers glanced over his shoulder, "and who is that girl?"

"I'm working in a factory—and that girl is my landlady's daughter."

"You—carrying a basket of—" she peered, then frowned.

"Vegetables—don't they look good?" he countered.

There was in his face a look so frank, so pleading, that said so clearly, "Trust me—I'm playing the game," that, even in this grotesque meeting, she caught at a grain of reassurance. Something electric passed between them, as though the lad leaning on her understanding had reached that inward part of her, which, overlaid with a social glaze, preserved nevertheless a high, fine power of distinction. This roused in her a glow that was suddenly checked when she met Greta's blue enquiring eyes.

"Kenneth," she commanded abruptly, "get into this car and come home with me."

"I'm sorry—I can't."

There was a pause in which she heard Greta breathe sharply.

"It was very hard to make up my mind," he went on, "but it's done now. I'm—I'm not working exactly for money—but—I only have what I earn. I've written all about it." He hesitated and with a queer dislike to introducing Sylvia's name added, "There won't be any change."

"But can't you live with us?"

He laughed outright. "It's awfully kind of you, but that wouldn't work." Then turning, "This is Greta Sohmer."

Mrs. Chambers recoiled spiritually but extended a white-gloved hand. "How do you do?"

The girl nodded but did not speak. The blood had crept to her temples. She only stood motionless, while from her thinly covered breast, from arms, neck and lips, from the round curves of her body, surged the immortal appeal. Bertha Chambers recognized it and for an instant felt weak and helpless before it. Youth and the power of youth, spring and its hot flame, flesh and the glamour of it—all these had ranged themselves beside the man whom Sylvia loved—and yet he said that he would not return. She drew back swiftly. This acquaintanceship began to seem unmoral.

“Kenneth,” she ventured again, “won’t you help me—both of us?”

“Mrs. Chambers,” he said slowly, “I know I ’m asking a good deal—but won’t you trust me?”

As he spoke he seemed immune to the voluptuous intimacy of Greta’s presence, but, glancing again, Bertha Chambers sighed despairingly. She did not know enough of youth to determine the weapons it uses to fight against itself. She only knew that the cold counsel of age was ineffectual. And might not Kenneth in this new and unexplained existence crave stronger meat than the delicate beauty of Sylvia?

“Will you come and see me?” She felt curiously faint.

A wrinkle appeared on the lad’s brow. “It would be easier not—if you don’t mind. You ’ll understand afterwards.”

She grasped at this new element of hope. “You promise that?”

“Yes,” he said gently—“I promise.”

“Home.” The speaking tube slipped from her fingers, and as the car moved forward she shot one last glance at Greta and met the girl’s steady stare. Into the blue eyes had come something proud and defiant. This bridged her silence and proclaimed that from now on she would oppose

to this strange woman her whole armament. She was on guard, come what might.

The car turned at the next corner and again Bertha Chambers looked back. She could not see Kenneth's face—but the girl was standing closer to him.

That night halfway through dinner, she summoned her self-control and gulped down the lump in her throat.

"I saw Kenneth to-day."

Chambers stared at her. "You did? Where? What's he doing?"

Answering one question at a time, she said evenly. "Yes—on Broad Street and he's working in a factory."

"The infernal ass. Why did n't you bring him here?"

His wife colored faintly. "He would n't come. I argued with him but without any result. He just refused, that's all. He was very polite and said it was all for the best, and that if I—if we would only trust him, we'd understand later on. He's written to Sylvia and explained the whole affair. He looks well. He was with a—a—friend."

There was a certain finality in her tone which suggested that there was nothing more to be said, however much she might know. Chambers reflected and changed his ground.

"Then if you 're satisfied about him, we 'd better cable."

"I have cabled," remarked the surprising woman. "I telephoned it the minute I got home."

Her husband stroked his pointed beard. "What—did you say?"

"I referred her to Kenneth's letter and said he was perfectly well."

"Then you did discover enough to satisfy you?"

"No—but he looks very much in earnest, and I should n't be surprised if—"

"Yes!"

"If he has a better head than we thought."

Her husband sighed with relief. "How long does this farce last?"

"Till Sylvia comes back." She caught the ring in her own voice and it amazed her.

"Did you get his address?"

"No—I did n't want to ask for what he did n't offer. If you 're finished, we 'll have coffee in the garden."

Sylvia's answer arrived next day. "Letters and your cablegram received. Everything all right. Please do not attempt to influence any one. I understand. Am quite well."

The message comforted Bertha Chambers till night. Then she went to bed and dreamed about Greta Sohmer.

CHAPTER V

↑ SLOWLY, almost unconsciously, Kenneth was drawn into the warp of the factory. The sense that he was one of a multitude enveloped him. This multitude, like a swarm of ants, lived and labored, loved and died; a microcosm, swayed by emotion, reflecting in every articulation the larger cosmos around it. There were days when the factory was dour and menacing, days when it rocked with mirth, but all the time it was on guard against something which Kenneth did not yet recognize. One evening a corner of the curtain was lifted.

Sohmer, at supper, was noticeably silent. He ate little and sent sharp glances at his boarder as though questioning what sort of a man he might be at bottom. Then he pushed away his plate and began to talk with a curious note in his deep voice.

“There is trouble coming. To-day we worked, not by the day but by the piece. I have made four dollars instead of two and one-half. Why? Because the room has gone mad. Because every man has done two men’s work. To-morrow it will be the same—and next day. I have seen this thing before—it is a trick.”

Kenneth wanted to laugh, but a glint in the blue eyes checked him. It seemed ridiculous that Sohmer should complain of making an extra dollar and a half. He was amazed that it could be done.

"To-night," rumbled on the big man, "I am tired—too tired to sleep. I have told the men about the trick, but no—they will not see it. Already their palms feel the pay envelope. It is fatter—for one week."

Mrs. Sohmer and Greta did not speak. Motionless and seemingly unstirred they sat, but actually they were waiting, keyed tense with anxiety—for what the master should say. It was not often that he said much.

He crooked a finger at Kenneth. "Come outside."

They rested on the porch steps, and in the twilight Sohmer began to talk evenly and almost sadly.

"The thing is coming—yes—here, as it has come in other places—maybe in six months—maybe in a year. To-morrow the calender room will be happy—but on Monday—Monday will be different. I say this because I *know*."

"Go on," said Kenneth. His brain was taut.

"It is the old story," nodded Sohmer, "and it must be gone through here in Brunton. When one

deals with human passion one is on the edge of a volcano. Is it not so?"

"Who are you?" Kenneth's voice was high and nervous. A strange consciousness thrilled him.

The big hand dropped gently on the young man's knee. "Why must you ask that? Is it not sufficient that my name is Jacob Sohmer, that my key is number 14 of the calender room and—that—" he hesitated and concluded softly, "I trust my new friend, John Anderson."

"But you're different. Why do you work here?"

"Why should I not—and the same question I might ask, but I will not ask—you will tell me some day."

The big form seemed to take on a new shape in the dusk. Then Greta's voice sounded in the house. Kenneth was jerked back. His brows wrinkled. Why should Greta's voice do that?

Next day at work it was still in his mind, sticking there with a queer persistence for a matter so absurd. He began to be conscious of Greta, whatever he did. His thoughts jumped to Sylvia, and just as the factory began to fade away and the glimmer of his whirring saw melted into something unreal, he became suddenly aware that Pethick was in the room, watching him.

At the same moment the chatter stopped. All seemed unnaturally intent upon work, with eyes glued to the revolving rolls. Kenneth felt the cold glance and looked up. Pethick stood, slim, straight, and immaculate. He wore a hat, and this in itself was noticeable. His eyes rested on the saw, then traveled deliberately up Kenneth's arms till they reached his face.

"Well, Anderson?" There was an inflection on the name that carried its own suggestion.

Kenneth flushed and heaved a lump of rubber into the trough. He did not want to speak if he could help it. The saw tore into the lump with a fine spray flying from its hissing teeth.

"Got on to your job yet?"

The mass fell apart and the steel disc vanished.

"Yes, I think so." It was a comfort to remember that this man was under Sylvia's orders. He swiftly wondered whether Sylvia would dare to give orders.

Pethick turned to Sanderson who had come up and was waiting beside him. "Got a mill to put this man on?"

"No—they're all full."

"Then send him into the calender room to-morrow. He'll get a better chance there. What's your name again?" he added with a sharp glance.

"John Anderson," said Kenneth smoothly.

"Comes easier now, eh?"

"What? The work?"

"What else?" Pethick's face was expressionless. It might have been an automaton that spoke.

"Yes—much easier. In fact—"

"There 's nothing to it?" A glimmer of a real smile appeared on the thin lips.

"That 's about it."

"Hm—How long have you been here?"

"About three weeks."

"I 've had men on that saw three years and they haven't had the nerve to say that." He paused and his stare tried to bore into the new hand's very brain. For a moment they stood, manager and mill hand, while something quick and unintelligible sped from the gray eyes.

"You 'll go into the other room to-morrow and help on a calender. Watch the rolls and watch your fingers. Try what you can do and I 'll see you again. Good-day—Anderson."

He vanished through the door, but his mocking, half-serious, half joking tone lingered after him. Kenneth, puzzled and confused, grasped his lever again. That Pethick had spotted him as a man in disguise was evident, but that was no reason for any particular interest. It would seem rather a matter for suspicion. Perry's high-pitched voice came in.

"Say, you 're gettin' on—you are. Just as soon as I get some one I can talk to, I lose him. I ain't sorry for you though. How did you fix him?"

Kenneth laughed. "I didn't do anything. Perhaps they 're short of help in the calender room."

"Short!" Perry smiled scornfully. "Short—why that 's the best place in the whole mill. Not too hot, and dry—bone dry. You don't stand in a puddle there."

"Perhaps you 'll move on yourself." The lad had a throb of compassion for this consumptive wasting so visibly before his inflexible machine.

"Move on—oh, yes," coughed Perry wearily. "I 'm going to do that all right." Presently he added with a strange calm on his hollow face, "And you 'll know it when I do."

Kenneth caught something sinister in the inflexion. "What do you mean?"

"Three hundred days in the year and seven hundred pounds of gum a day, makes a hundred and five tons a year I 've put through a mill for the last five years. Before that, it was n't so much—a thousand tons maybe in my time I 've handled, and watched those damn rolls till I dream of them every night and see them coming up the bed to catch me. Then I get my hands onto 'em and shout and wake up sweating. When a man begins

to dream about his machine, why it 's time to move on—ain't it?"

Perry stooped, caught the brown slab that was being crunched slowly through and bent it up so that it formed a great loose ring 'round the front roll. The mill gnawed at this, its massive frame trembling with the pressure.

"They take a holt, don't they? There 's no getting away from that grip. Whatever 's in there just gets squeezed and flattened into a ribbon till it 's too thin for the metal to bite on." He stood back, a white, almost transparent wraith of a man. "That would flatten a monkey wrench just as easy as an orange. Look!"

Darting a swift glance about the room, he stooped, and, picking up a large nail, dropped it in. The mill gave a slight, dull knock and something tumbled into the pan beneath. Perry picked it out, a thin strip of iron nearly as thin as paper.

"It don't make any particular harm at the ends of the rolls. They don't do any work anyway. Better not let Sanderson get holt of that. That nail, it's like me—only I 've been going through for years." He laughed sardonically. "You take care of yourself and wait."

For the rest of the day, Kenneth watched Perry closely. Now that he knew more about a mill, he was appalled at the risks the consumptive took.

He treated his machine almost with contempt, leaning over it, tightening and loosening the great screws that set the distance of the rolls from each other, letting his thin hands approach the danger point till it seemed that in another instant those inflexible monsters must grip his fingers and begin to gnaw away at his lean arms. But always the man's skill predetermined his safety. He appeared to know just what liberties he could take, just how lightly he might play with death, just what point in that narrowing curve he might reach. It looked as though years of labor had enabled him to see beneath the surface of the rolls and interpret some metallic life that lay within. The mill was like a dog that sulked but always came to heel.

It was near the end of the day when he looked up and saw the alarm in the new hand's face. "I just want to tell you that there's nothing to be afraid of." He patted the frame almost affectionately. "This mill can't hurt me unless I want her to. And I don't, at least," he added under his breath, "not to-night." That for a while was Kenneth's last impression of Perry.

The work in the calender room was vastly different. Old heads, wise in rubber, were gathered here. Sohmer presided over one machine—the one that handled the most expensive product. He

moved about with a certain calm dignity that influenced even his helpers. From the other end of the room Kenneth had occasional glimpses of him. There was never any excitement 'round Sohmer's machine.

The men were working like fury. With the exception of Sohmer's, every crew raced through the day. The stolid machines could not be hurried, but lost time could be and was reduced to a frenzied minimum. By Saturday noon, the hands were nervous, exhausted, and overwrought.

Sohmer spoke of it that evening. "On Monday you shall see." That was all he would say. Kenneth could get nothing more out of him on the subject, so mentioned Perry, his bravado and skill.

For a while Sohmer, plunged in thought, said nothing. After a while a curious light dawned in his blue eyes and he began with intense earnestness.

"I have been waiting that of these things I may tell you. In your face I see honesty and ask that of what I talk you will say nothing. So—that is understood?"

"Of course," Kenneth's breath came a little faster.

"Then listen— Of the men in the factory—you know nothing. You see the side that works with

arms and hands—but that is all. In Perry you see a sick mill hand. So! But in Perry, I see a man with a great soul, who, one year from to-day, will not be alive. He has five children and the seed of his malady is in them all. In the others I see men who have sold their time for ten hours a day, but for the other fourteen are not at all similar. The part that a man sells is not himself. He keeps that for his wife and family and perhaps his God and it may be for the devil. Very well. This part is strong and passionate and wilful. It knows much that it hides because it is safer. It has powers it is afraid to use because they are great.”

He paused, stirred by deep emotion. Kenneth saw the great hands loose their smoothness and stretch out tense, as though Sohmer were calling his people to him.

“Now,” he resumed presently. “You ask me why I work in a factory. It is partly because on me is laid the burden to try to help and to control these men whom you do not know. For lack of a better name I am a Socialist, and,” he added gently, “so are most of the men. The factory has made them so. The world is full of factories owned by rich people, who are also good. Their product is Socialism.”

The lad's memory wandered back to a conversa-

tion he had once heard between his father and a friend on the subject. Henry Landon, speaking with the grace that characterized him, had finished by saying that the thing was settled for us by nature, settled by the ineradicable differences of brain and ability—and being a phase of nature the underdog had his own proper and peculiar place in humanity. Part of this Kenneth now put into awkward words. It struck him as somehow sounding hollow.

Sohmer listened patiently and shook his head. "In the old Roman law one question always was asked at a trial, 'To whom was this thing for good?' That was very wise—very fair. I ask that now. Can you—my friend who has yet so far to go, answer it?"

But Kenneth was frankly over his depth. He laughed and said so.

"The fool," answered Sohmer thoughtfully, "is the man who does not know how little he knows. Next week—on Saturday—you will come with me. I shall a new door open, and you will see what is inside."

With that he got up and went into the house. Kenneth, gazing after him wonderingly, mounted to his room to write to Sylvia. At the head of the stairs he saw a light beneath the door.

Greta was putting clean sheets on his bed. She

looked up as he came in and, as their glances met, turned inexpressibly pale. Her blouse was open at the neck. A strand of yellow hair had fallen inside her collar and lay close against the white skin. Kenneth apologized and stepped back.

"No. Don't go. I am finished." She put the pillow in place and smoothed it. Kenneth, watching her, was struck with the extraordinary intimacy of it all. They might have been alone in the world together.

"Thank you very much, Greta." His voice sounded queer and distant.

She did not speak, but coming closer leaned against the wall. Through the thin collar he could see the round curve of her shoulder. Her lips were parted. Her eyes, wide and full of changing light, clung to him with a dewy insistence. Slowly her color rose and dyed neck and throat till she looked pink and rich.

He tried to speak lightly, but instantly became aware that her whole spirit was beating down on him in a passion of abandonment. "You must understand," it said, "you must."

His throat grew stiff and parched. The girl was terrifically potent and from her poured the ever-amazing appeal of her child-bearing sisterhood. He was alone and weary. How natural now seemed things that he had always shunned

before. Her eyes did not leave him. She began to sway unsteadily. Involuntarily his hand went out to her shoulder.

But that touch was too much. Her arms were flung 'round him and he felt the throbbing body against his breast.

"I love you," she panted, "I love you. You are different. Yes, I know that, but it does not matter. Perhaps it is because of that. Perhaps you cannot marry, but it does not matter. I want my man. So—do you understand? I must be loved. It will kill me if I am not." She put her head on his shoulder and held him close.

"Greta," he said desperately. "You don't understand. I'm going to marry some one. Can't you see? I didn't mean to say anything, but now—"

"Not for one year," she breathed. "I have heard all that the lady said, and I have told no one. Just for one year—and then you can forget. I will do everything for you and I will be your slave—but I must love you or kill myself." She began to tremble violently, her tears coming in a rush. "Don't you understand? You are my lover—all the girls have lovers."

He loosed the clinging arms and looked deep into her eyes. "Greta—stop. You don't know what you are saying. You must go to bed now. I do

like you very much indeed and you have been very, very kind, but don't you see that I can't be any girl's lover?" Impulsively he leaned over and kissed her forehead. "Now, we're going to be very good friends. Are n't we? Come!"

Slowly she drew away, but her gaze still clung to him. At the stairs her hand went out and felt for the railing. She stood for a moment while the yearning of her encompassed him so strongly that he had wild visions that slowed the beating of his heart and called all his loyalty to arms. Then she turned and went slowly down, but not with the step of one who has failed.

CHAPTER VI

BENNETT, the general foreman of the factory, was small, thin, and angular, with a sharp, fox-like face and a noiseless tread. He, too, had grown into the place with old James Percival. Now, saturated with its odors and anointed with its tropic gums, he had long since become indifferent to all but rubber. A master workman, wise in the tricks of the trade and armed against every conspiracy of the ranks from which he himself had sprung, he occupied an intermediate post between Pethick and the foremen of individual departments. In this composite office, he served not only as an exchange switchboard but also as an operator. Whatever reached Pethick, was known and modulated by him. Whatever orders went out from the manager filtered first through Bennett.

He was a strange character. Hours after the works closed, Bennett might have been found poking through the factory, examining tools and machinery, mentally rearranging process after process, walking down mechanical aisles, feeling, pinching, and testing the product of the day. From

these excursions he went slowly home with his eyes screwed up in an unending query of how to get more done for the same price, and it was on one of them, while he regarded the gleaming calenders that the conception was born which resulted in the calender room being put on piece work for a week. But when Bennett saw the effect, he had been almost frightened. By the second night the output of the room had gone up twenty per cent. He took the figures and put them before Pethick.

"They 're making too much," he growled. "It 's going to upset the whole place."

Pethick was undisturbed. "Put them back on the old wages." He reflected, then added, "and set a minimum day's work, ten per cent. above the old average."

"They won't do it."

"Have n't they shown they can do it? What 's the matter with you?" Pethick swung impatiently in his chair.

"Don't know that there 's anything the matter, but it 's in my head we 're going to have trouble."

"Where? In the calender room?"

"Don't know that. I just kind of smell it. 'Tain't what men say or do that makes me suspicious. It 's what they don't do. Sort of remember how I felt myself."

"Got your eye on any one?" Pethick was lean-

ing forward, his own eyes very keen. "What about Sohmer—remember what you said?"

"Well—I guess I was wrong. There 's no trouble there. He never makes any fuss and I guess he 's about the best man on fine work I 've got. No, I guess we 're better off with him than without him. I 'll keep you posted, but I don't know as there 's much to say yet. Calm before the storm, mebbe."

He turned to the door, but Pethick stopped him with a gesture.

"I was looking at Perry yesterday. He can't hold it down much more."

"Yes. I know that 's been coming a long time."

The cold eyes examined the office ceiling. "Are you going to keep him on?" There was an inflection in the voice that questioned whether any one would be such a fool.

"Oh—you mean—" Bennett moved his feet uncomfortably. He had a vision of a white face bending over the dripping mill.

"Yes. You can see for yourself. Suppose he got caught—now."

"Expensive, eh?" The foreman spoke under his breath.

"I don't know that. I don't want to say any more about it. I 'm not giving any orders. You know the policy in these matters."

A spark of humanity in Bennett's breast burst into sudden flame. "Yes, I know—and it 's a hell of a policy."

Pethick's lips pressed tight. "If you 're not satisfied—"

But Bennett was already out of the room. In these days he had been conscious of rare and queer upheavals that seemed at variance with everything a smart factory needed to make it go. The question of Perry now bored into him and behind it twisted the other question of how he would feel if he were Perry. On his way to the calender room with a typewritten notice in his hand, he went round to have a look. The sick man was slacking the screws of his machine with a short iron bar. He glanced up and caught the foreman's eye, but tugged on with a steady weariness. The red spots in his cheeks were almost livid.

Bennett, with apparent unconcern, stepped up and, ostensibly inspecting the mill, said something that for all except Perry was drowned in the steady rumble of the gear wheels. Then, with the same outward indifference, he went through to the calender room.

Perry stood quite motionless. His lips were parted and the pink spots had vanished leaving his face like marble. One hand still held the iron bar, the other, wet and transparent, felt in the air

for something it could not find. Poised thus he seemed to have neither physical nor material existence, but to be as it were some palpitating ember, clad in working clothes through which his spirit glowed with a thin, pale beam. His eyes, tense and preternaturally bright, shone like candles with penultimate light. He was a consciousness, a presence and embodiment, preserved for a breath in outworn human tissues.

In the calender room, Bennett tacked up the notice. An instantaneous telepathy spread the fact, and every man in the room paused for a moment to watch him. By noon all had read it, and when the whistle blew the place buzzed like a hive.

"Stung again," said a helper at Kenneth's machine. He laughed savagely. "By God, Sohmer was right after all."

"What do you mean?"

"Mean! Don't you see the whole thing was a plot to find out just how much a gang could do, and then hold us up to it."

"The piece-work was a trick!"

"Of course it was. We were n't wise to it—that's all." The man thrust his arms into his coat. "This ain't the end of it—you can gamble on that."

Kenneth walked to his dinner in a maze. This was Sylvia's factory and she had hardly ever en-

tered it. He was swayed by a protest that struck deep—nearly to his very love. Did she care so little? Was she not deep enough to even guess that such things could happen, or did she not want to guess—and so kept away? He raced upstairs to write—no—to cable, in a flush of anger.

But Sohmer's voice downstairs brought him sharply back. Sohmer had known what was coming! By what amazing instinct could he know? The voice was quiet and steady, and Mrs. Sohmer answered just as evenly. And these people had faced this sort of thing for years, until the husband, at least, was actually prepared for it. Prepared for what? The trickery by which Pethick squeezed out a still greater dividend for—?

The lad put his face between his hands. His brain wrenched itself from one thought to another till it became quite clear that, moved as he was, it would be easy to wreck the whole structure of his dreams. What had happened to-day was only one strand in the cord he had determined to trace.

Sohmer called from below and he went down. The two ate silently, mechanically satisfying bodies that like boilers must be supplied with fuel to do their work. Greta did not appear.

That afternoon the calender room was nervous and jumpy. Men looked from the clock to the work still to be run through their machines. An-

draws, the room foreman, strung to a high pitch, moved restlessly about. He was palpably afraid to urge, yet consumed with anxiety lest the additional ten per cent. of fabric be not handled. The various gangs took no notice of him. They, too, were on a fine edge, lest they should do more than enough.

In the midst of this, Andrews, yielding to the strain, stepped up to a mechanic who was adjusting a pipe with a heavy wrench. "Look out—you 'll break that."

The man's hands trembled, and, the wrench slipping, he blazed out into white anger. "To hell with you," he screamed in a high-pitched shaky voice, "and with the machine too." He flung his tool straight between the huge revolving cylinders.

The metal gripped. Instantly there was a shock that seemed to loosen the huge machine on its footing. The wrench flattened and moved straight through. But just as it cleared the back of the rolls and was about to drop out, the frame of the calender yielded and at the same moment a cylinder neck broke off clean. Then came the grind of stripping gear wheels and the mass lay shattered and inert.

Andrews was like chalk. "Stop that man!" he shouted.

But the mechanic, already clearing the doorway,

turned and laughed grimly. "To hell with your ten per cent." He disappeared, chuckling.

A queer sound ran down the long row of machinery. The foreman stood irresolute, staring at the ruin. It would take thousands of dollars to make good that damage. He sent for Bennett and was about to give some orders, when high above the muffled rumble of the factory shrilled an agonized shriek. Clear and sharp it came, cutting into the drone of pulleys and the growl of gearing. Home it struck into the brain of all who heard it—for it meant just one thing.

Back from their machines they stepped, while without words the ghastly thing ran to and fro. A man was in a mill. Bennett appeared, and racing down the long aisle swung sharp into the washroom. Through motionless groups, Kenneth stumbled after him. The tremor of that section of shafting stopped altogether. At the same moment the power was shut off the calenders.

At the door of the washroom was a struggling crowd that parted to let Bennett through. Sanders with a ghastly look pushed the others back.

"Keep out," he rasped, "keep out."

A tall man in the front rank stood on tiptoe and peered over the foreman's shoulder. He recoiled and put his hands over his eyes.

"It's Perry," he said thickly. "My God—I saw him."

A stretcher was brought in and the iron door banged behind it.

In the courtyard, the hands gathered and spoke in whispers, automatically taking out their pipes and holding them unlit. The place had dropped into a deathlike stillness. The clashing of a furnace door in the boiler room sounded harshly. At a sudden, short blast of the factory whistle, the whole throng started nervously. The whistle ordered them home, but still they waited for what they feared to see.

The door opened and Bennett came out. "Go on, you fellows," he commanded shakily. "You can't do any good here—go on now. You need n't ring out."

They moved slowly past the timekeeper's office onto the pavement. Women and children joined them, many of whom had run to the gate at that short, significant blast. Mrs. Perry who lived at a distance was not there. The news filtered down the street.

Kenneth felt a touch on his shoulder and saw Sohmer. Tears were running down the giant's face. "My people—my people—" he whispered brokenly.

"How did it happen?" said the lad with a ter-

rific effort at control. "He seemed to know everything about a mill."

Sohmer's eyes, full of unfathomable meaning, were fixed on him.

"You don't understand?"

"What? What is there one can't understand?"

"That was not an accident." The deep voice shook with emotion. "It was Perry's offering of his body. He might have worked a little longer and been laid off—with nothing. But when a man is killed at his work the new law takes care of his children till they are of age—and his wife, if that is necessary too. Perry's wife will be better off now. Perry knew that."

Kenneth reeled, and felt a hand under his arm. The voice sounded again. "My friend—does the door begin to open—just a little?"

Half an hour later he lay on his bed. His brain was tortured with blind questions that would not down—that shook even love itself. Part of the veil had been wrenched away and he trembled at what might yet lie behind its mysterious folds. Utterly lonely, utterly downcast, he longed for one compassionate soul to whom he might unburden the struggle of his soul. And Sylvia! But somehow he could not think of Sylvia.

A knock sounded.

"Come in," he said dully.

Greta stood on the threshold. Her eyes were soft and from them streamed an ineffable tenderness. She came forward and stooped over him.

"My man," she crooned in an ecstasy of yearning, "my man."

Then she pressed his head against the softness of her breast.

CHAPTER VII

THE factory picnic was an annual affair attended by practically every employee of the company. The custom was to charter a steamer and cross the lake to a park near the Falls. To this excursion entire families looked forward with pleasure. For a day at any rate there would be a release from rubber.

Long before the hour there was a general trek to the dock. Burdened groups climbed to the upper decks and, thrusting their baskets beneath the seats, surveyed the oncoming tide. Men shouted hearty greetings to others with whom they had worked for twenty years.

There was something invigorating about it all. The cool air breathed across the harbor, and breathless women in glossy skirts drank it in gratefully. Pethick arrived and was received with a curious mixture of restraint and affability. The unwritten law of the day was good fellowship, whatever might lie in front of or after it. Little girls walked up and down, arm in arm. Boys watched them awkwardly or slipped off to see the engines, while their fathers lit cigars that

bore vivid labels, and watched the superintendent as he took out his silver cigarette case.

The steamer got under way, heading through the gap and on into wider waters. On the skyline there became visible the great stacks of the Consumers Rubber Co. From their blackened mouths trailed faint wisps of smoke that spoke of banked fires and low steam. These dwindled, till there was left on the horizon only a blur into which skyscrapers thrust dim and blunted fingers.

Kenneth sat with the Sohmers, it being the accepted thing that men did not at once desert the women of their own party. Greta was dressed in white. A flower pinned at her breast rose and fell with her quick breathing. She was very gay—with a wonderful color in her cheeks. Kenneth thought he had never seen such joyous health as flashed in her quick glance. Sohmer was reading.

Presently Kenneth felt a touch on his arm. "Show Greta the boat," said her mother placidly.

The lad colored. Other couples had begun to parade. The girls seemed possessive and confident; the young men sheepish and self-conscious. Still blushing, he looked at Greta. She was superb and met his eyes with a certain pride. Behind this, moved a suggestion of something else that baffled, then piqued him.

"Come along," he said with sudden abandonment and held out his arm.

They joined the parade. Mrs. Sohmer's gaze followed them. On her face rested a peculiar contentment that would have disturbed Kenneth had he seen it. But for the moment he felt only the pressure of a strong young arm and the touch of a firm shoulder against his own. She seemed to have no weight but to undulate along beside him in a rhythm that matched the very beating of his heart.

To Greta it was a sort of triumphal march. Kenneth was different, not only in the distinction of his face but in the very cut of his clothes. She knew that the younger of the factory hands were noting them and guessing what they cost, but even this faded beside the fact that he was walking out with her. For to-day at any rate he was her own. She flushed with pride, and a secret joy burned in her breast. It might almost have been their wedding journey.

Presently Kenneth felt her arm tighten. Immediately ahead and coming straight toward them was Sanders. His brows were drawn down and he stared forbiddingly.

"Good morning, Mr. Sanders. Aren't we having a fine day?" Greta spoke briskly, but Kenneth detected a daring note in her voice.

The foreman did not answer. There came a stiffening of his shoulders and a long stare into the girl's eyes from which she shrank not at all. Kenneth had an impression that something flashed between them.

"You don't seem very glad to see me," she added carelessly.

"Oh, yes—I 'm always glad to see you." Sanders dwelt on the last word with a touch of insolence.

"Then you and Mr. Anderson have n't met?" Greta was enjoying the situation immensely. "Shake."

Kenneth laughed and held out his hand. It was a good opportunity to make friends. But the instant he met Sanders's grip it closed over his palm like a vice. The foreman's eyes were passionless and not a motion betrayed him. Kenneth felt his knuckles grind and had a twinge of exquisite pain, till with a grim effort he closed his fist and met grip with grip. They stood thus for an instant, each pouring into that fierce clasp all the strength he could muster. Simultaneously they let go.

"Glad you know each other," said Greta carelessly. "See you again, Mr. Sanders."

She strolled on with apparent unconcern, but when they reached a corner of the deck, she turned

suddenly. Her eyes were darting flame. "I hate him—I hate him. Show me your hand."

"Why—what 's the matter?" Kenneth spoke airily, but his fingers were limp.

"Show me your hand. I know. Do you think I don't know." She was imperious.

"It 's nothing. I gave as much as I got." He put his numb hand on her arm. The touch warmed its deadness.

Greta glanced round, then laid his palm against her smooth cheek. "Ah—the dear hand—the dear hand. I should not have asked you to shake. I should instead have told you."

"Told me what?"

"Mr. Sanders wants to marry me. Two weeks ago I said 'No.' He is very angry. He does not like you, because I told him you were my man. Don't speak now as you spoke before. To-day we shall be very happy, shall we not? There is not any woman who shall give more to make you happy and there is not one who asks for so little that you shall give." Her gaze was softly insistent and demanded his answer. She moved closer. The pressure of her shoulder was electric.

Kenneth was profoundly touched. Again and again during the last weeks he had seen what tender barriers these women raised between their men

and the annoyances of life. From morning till night they labored cheerfully that they—the mainstays—should find a home fit for their reward. How wisely and gently they shared their anxieties, in how magnificent a silence they accepted the blows of adversity—above all how they understood. And here was Greta, stirred with some mysterious unrest, yet compassing in her sweet young body all the hard-worn courage and wisdom of the ranks, asking only for the crumbs that for a few months he might let fall unnoticed. Involuntarily he leaned forward and their lips met. The girl's were cool and dewy and they clung to his delicately.

"You know how fond I am of you," he said unsteadily—"dear Greta."

Mrs. Sohmer looked at them fixedly as they walked slowly back. Her face was full of quiet contentment. But Sohmer himself only laid down his book and stared over the rail.

The steamer was now entering the mouth of the Niagara River. Swinging upstream, it penetrated inland to the foot of that great escarpment through which the river has cut its mighty gorge. Electric cars waited at the dock and in a few moments the whole party was whirling upstream close beside the foaming rapids. It was an old sensation for Kenneth, but gradually he became infected

with the general pleasure. How far behind the factory seemed. What a roar of water—what spray—what magnificently curving waves!

The seats were crammed with rubber workers. Their chatter mingled with the rumbling of wheels. Every minute was to be enjoyed. One noted the pallor in many faces and the fine, black lines in the wrinkles on a fireman's neck—lines that he would always carry. The women mothered their broods like hens. It was a proud child that sat on its father's knee, for the men clustered in groups and left their wives curiously alone while they talked on all subjects but the factory. For the day that was eliminated.

Dinner was eaten from long tables in the park. From here they could watch the Falls themselves dipping in a vast sheer sweep into the chaos below. The wind brought a fine, cold mist that sifted over them in a moist freshness. The deep, velvety thunder of the cataract spread wide, booming softly from the river bed. From their feet the cleft earth yawned precipitately. It was a place of wonder and vast forces and a certain, ancient primordial vitality, and it penetrated into the factory workers and held them enthralled.

Games were held in the afternoon. Into these the excursionists entered hilariously. There were fat people's races in which stout men and women

taxed unaccustomed muscles and threw themselves laughing and breathless in the shade to recover. Young fellows jumped, put weights, wrestled, and tugged. Over them all rested the blessing of the holiday. Pethick himself treated the children to rides and their parents to cool drinks and cigars. The eyes of his employees followed as he circulated amongst them, jestingly comparing Niagara Falls with the millroom—here and there asking an old hand if he did not miss the soapstone. He joked particularly with the girls, and Kenneth felt a hot flush when the manager's eyes rested on Greta with a queer and sudden flame in their steel gray depths. Greta saw it too and turned stiffly away, whereat Pethick glanced at Kenneth with a sort of unhallowed suggestiveness and laughed audibly.

At six o'clock there was a rush for the electric cars. Tired children were dragged along or carried in their fathers' arms. Small heads began to droop and tired hands to relax—surfeited with such a day of delight. The women carried empty baskets. Their faces had commenced to lose their unaccustomed repose and betrayed again signs of the old strain now that they were turned once more toward the distant city. Smart young men, whose shiny collars, creased trousers, and startling waistcoats once attracted universal attention,

had by this time lost their distinction and were merged in the crowd. The girls' white dresses looked crushed and no longer fresh. Committee men, wearing red badges and who had planned the day, peered anxiously about lest any of the party be left behind. The whole affair had been a success and it must not be marred now. Their responsibility would end when the steamer began her homeward trip. Pethick had disappeared; he was returning by rail. Sohmer was everywhere—calm, persuasive, and helpful. Presently the cars started.

The run to the steamer was made down hill through the dusk. This time the rapids seemed unearthly. They raced alongside the cars and belled hoarsely through the fading light, tossing wild, pale crests and hissing sharply against broken rocky ledges. The steamer was twinkling with electric lamps when the crowd flowed on board. There was little talking, and families clustered together, settling down for a two-hour trip. Girls and their beaux sought secluded corners and sat with arms round each other in wordless contentment. Each knew—each understood—so what reason was there for talk? As the vessel's sharp prow divided the calm waters of the lake Kenneth felt Greta's eyes upon him. Glancing at her he read their message—it was very plain.

"There is something I must tell you," she said softly. "Perhaps you do not understand. I am not the same as I was."

"What do you mean, Greta?" His voice was very gentle.

"Here," she laid her hand on her breast; "I have always known what I wanted to be, but till you came I did not know how. You are different and I am becoming different, too. A girl cannot have in her heart what I have and be the same as before."

"Don't change."

"But, yes, always I knew that some day it would come. I have only waited for some one to speak and look—like you. It is not that I do not love my own people—" she glanced at him appealingly—"but there are so many things that hurt and they should not hurt. I am not proud, no."

"You are splendid," he ventured a little unsteadily.

"There are in me two people," she went on quickly, "and one person has worked always, but the other person till you came was asleep, and it is that person I shall feel the most. So after this, when there is something in me that you do not understand, it is the old Greta not the new one."

The outline of the city lay jeweled across the black water, when her hand which had lain soft

and still and warm within his own, closed on his palm, in a firm clasp.

"You have made me so happy to-day," she concluded softly. "There was not one girl who was so happy as I. You will not think of anything but just that. Perhaps," she added under her breath, "I shall not feel so again. Something tells me that I shall love you very much and it will hurt me—here," she touched her breast.

For a moment he did not reply. Already the city was revealing dark gaps and canyons of streets, and the throb of its life came faintly to them. To-morrow he would be in the factory, and the next day and the next. Then he would go and see his father and watch the white fingers plucking feebly at the bedclothes, and search once more those empty, unresponsive eyes. All this would go on for a year, and a year seemed nothing short of a lifetime. Over it all would throb the insistent drone of the factory whose mysteries and methods he had aspired to solve. Suddenly, waiting there in the gloom beneath its great chimneys, the factory became a monstrous, insensate thing which had let him free for a day and now crouched ready to absorb him again. But Greta knew all this, and had lived in its shadow all her life. How was it she did not betray it? She sat conscious of some impending hurt, but braving it with a smile for

the sake of a day's forgetfulness, balancing the things that entered the narrow gate of her experience and putting them aside in the expectation of his own faint response. How little did her lavish soul demand! He could picture her—faithful, untiring, passionately courageous, infinitely resourceful, a Hercules of a helper, armed by nature and instinct to defend him. All this flickered through his brain as a defective film moves jerkily across the screen. Came the antithesis—the vision of Sylvia. Dainty and beautiful, she floated, undisturbed by realities, unvexed by the storms of life. Looking back at the brief days of their courtship, Kenneth found himself questioning not her ability to love but her capacity for horror and revolt and the depth of her emotion. Could he so sear her brain with indignation that it would flame up and destroy the system that had grown strong beneath the cold hands of her father and of Pethick? Could she abandon herself to a great resolve and undo this unworthy monument? He swore now that if it were in him, he would make her. He breathed sharply at the thought.

Instantly Greta's fingers tightened.

"Tell me—dear," she whispered—"tell me."

CHAPTER VIII

BY November Sylvia's letters had taken on a new tinge. Kenneth, with a curious sinking of his heart, began to race through before really reading them. He commenced to experience a certain breathlessness. The letters suggested more and more an emancipation to which they made no reference whatever, and were eloquent of things they did not say. The factory was only mentioned as a forbidding mechanism which made infinitely more delightful things possible. To their united future Sylvia began to allude as something which would free them both from responsibility, save that of choosing the most pleasing way to live. She considered Kenneth himself quixotic and not to be understood, but she loved him just the same. In a letter that was now on his table she said that he must come to Mentone for Christmas. The Percivals expected it, she expected it, and it would be foolish not to come. If his work was such that he could not leave it for a few weeks, she could not help feeling that it was the wrong kind of work. She concluded with, "You'd better come, dear." The words were underlined.

Kenneth read and re-read, and each time with

an increasing sense of hunger. Finally he began to write rapidly, feeling it more difficult than ever to say what must be said without revealing everything. It was impossible to come. He could leave neither his work nor his father for so long a time, and his father was beginning to show signs of improvement. As for the work, he must ask her still to trust him. Their separation was nearly half over, and he had learned much that would be vastly useful. She would be surprised and glad when she heard the whole story. Looking back on his own life he could see how pointless it once was, and it amazed him now that she could have found any interest in him at all. Next year he would be able to offer something worth while.

He paused, read it all carefully, and, with the thought that his letter would soon be in Sylvia's hand and perhaps next her heart, gave way to every expression of longing. At that moment he craved for her supremely. It was one that remained long in his memory.

A little later he heard Sohmer's voice at the door. The big man came in and sat on the edge of the bed.

"We can talk for a little, yes?" He did not look at the envelope.

"Of course." Kenneth turned to him with relief.

"There are many things to be said," began Sohmer slowly, "but I—do I talk to a friend? You understand, yes, but is it still a friend who understands?"

The lad colored. "Do you think anything has changed me?"

"Then you feel with us, and it is our eyes that you see with?"

"I don't understand a bit—now."

"Then listen. To me, a mechanic, comes a young man. He is different; the world has made him so. For months he lives, not his own life but mine, he does not his own work but mine, he obeys not himself but the man whom I obey. When trouble comes he is sad, and with the night, like me, he is weary. In his eyes I see the beginning of a new wisdom, the wisdom of labor. I wait till it all seems very clear, then I ask him, 'Does he feel with me, or with that which he knew before me?' So, is it plain?"

Kenneth caught his breath. Suddenly stripped clean of fear and doubt and self-interest, the question that agitated his own spirit sprang dominantly from this man's lips. For months the lad had felt it moving within him and for months he had buried it as a thing grotesque and unheard of. At first he recoiled with distaste from its severe and profound promptings. Why should he raise the altar

of such a sacrifice? But latterly the question, instead of being put aside, moved with him continuously. His eye wandered to Sylvia's letter. It seemed to mock him.

"Perhaps," continued Sohmer thoughtfully, "I ask too much. One door to you was opened when Perry died. I to-morrow another will open, but it must be to one who if he does not approve will not at least betray. So, is that plain also and does my friend agree?"

"What door do you mean?" said Kenneth with a touch of uncertainty.

"You think perhaps that the mechanic is helpless," answered Sohmer gravely; "that he moves in a herd and the herd moves at the crack of the whip. It is not so. Labor has no real master but labor. I sometimes wonder that it does not more often use its strength. Perhaps it will. Between you and the heart of labor there is a door, but if I open that you will see the heart beating."

"Why me?"

"Because for you I have waited many years."

Kenneth started, and a strange thrill ran through him. The pale blue eyes cast an inscrutable glance and the deep voice boomed on.

"Before you there may be much that you do not dream of, and after that will come greater things.

Where you came from does not matter, but where you go to is of much moment. I do know that you will suffer, for the shadow of suffering is on your face, but after the night will come the morning. Some day you will think of that when you find a stream of water in what you think is a wilderness."

He stopped abruptly. For an instant his face seemed transfigured with prophecy, then the old smile wreathed his lips and he waited, patiently confident.

Kenneth fumbled for words that would not come. At that moment he felt swept into some mysterious march, to which his feet kept strangely perfect time. He was conscious of something that was too strong to be misdirected, and far ahead he could see Sohmer in the van.

"To-morrow," he faltered. "Yes, you can count on me."

Sohmer nodded and went out without a word.

It was just twelve hours later that Bennett touched him on the shoulder. "Boss wants to see you; private office."

Pethick looked up unconcernedly as Kenneth entered. "Take a chair, have a cigar." He pressed a switch and a red light glowed over his office door.

"Suppose," he said smoothly, "suppose you

quit fooling for a while. I'll call you Anderson if you like. Of course that's not your name."

Kenneth's brow wrinkled and he looked hard into the flame of a match. The taste of a good cigar, the first in months, brought a multitude of reflections with it. "All right," he ventured, "fire away."

Pethick laughed outright. "I never saw a mechanic called John Anderson, or anything else, who knew how to light a cigar like you. Now,—" his voice sharpened a little—"I'm going to put some cards on the table and you can draw, if you like to play the game. First of all, I want to say that you are wasting your time pushing fabric into a machine; second, that I can make room for you in the office; and third, that if you are set on wearing overalls I can make you a proposition that will help out."

"It's your deal," put in Kenneth evenly.

Pethick fixed his cold gray eyes on his employee. "I'm taking it for granted because you're a gentleman. Now I don't care what your reasons are for coming here and it doesn't much matter anyway."

The employee chuckled. "I'm glad it doesn't."

"But if you can make up your mind whether you want to learn to run men or work with them, I'll talk to you and talk straight."

Kenneth had a curious sensation that Sohmer was standing behind Pethick waiting for the answer, Sohmer to whom he had just said, "Count on me."

"I want to learn the business, the practical end of it, from the ground up."

"That 's all right, but when you get up off the ground and know the business, who are you going to represent? The crowd that owns the works, or the crowd that quits at six o'clock?"

"Can't I represent both?"

Pethick smiled with almost a touch of compassion. "Try it and see. You talk like most of 'em talk who undertake to solve social problems at long distance. I worked in this factory—as an employee, mind you—just long enough to find out how much can be got out of men and machinery and still keep inside the danger point. But I didn't work one day longer, and moved in here. Old Percival saw what I was after and he was more than willing. One of the first things I got on to was that there are no secrets in this business; and if I wanted to find out what the Trust was doing I hired one of their chemists at twenty-five dollars a week extra, and"—here Pethick extended a long finger—"I found out. But that was n't the big problem." He glanced at Kenneth through narrowed lids, and fondled his cigar in

apparent abstraction. "This interest you?" he added, as though in after thought.

"Yes, tremendously."

"Then the big problem is labor, and everything else is child's play to it. There's been a good deal said, and tried as well, in the matter, and much of it by well-meaning people, but it's my idea that the philanthropist is a darn poor executive—the two don't jibe. It's easy enough to stand off and talk about the rights of the toiler, but so far I haven't observed that the toiler is over particular about the other fellow's rights—or contracts either."

"There's a way out of that," put in Kenneth suddenly.

Pethick wheeled on the instant. "Say, if you can discover it, you do the biggest thing of modern times—that's all. The world is yours."

"Why not try coöperation? The men are ready for it."

"Same old jaw,—," a suggestion of weariness crept into the manager's voice. "I've had that thrown at me more than once, but always by those who had nothing to lose. Coöperation means profit-sharing. But suppose there aren't any profits—eh! how about it?"

"You're taking an extreme view," objected Kenneth.

"I know it—but I 've got to; for if my scheme does n't provide for all sorts of conditions—extreme and otherwise—it goes to pieces. Don't run away with fairy tales. As I see it, the only way to make sure—dead sure, mind you—of your labor is to keep labor itself not quite sure of its job. Don't think I 'm in love with that part of my own work—for I 'm not."

The young man flushed hotly. "An unfair and uncomfortable way of doing business," he said bitterly.

"Business—modern business—is seldom comfortable, and I 'll tell you why," responded Pethick, coldly. "It 's something in which your competitor is sitting up nights trying to beat you out. You 're conscious of that all the time. It 's a cut-throat system, I admit, but it 's what we call business just the same. The result is that if I let up in my own efforts for a while, the other fellow forges just so much ahead. Now on top of that there is the responsibility for invested capital, and decent returns. The workingman may have his troubles, and I don't deny that they look big—and, damn it all, they *are* big to him—but as a matter of pure proportion you can't compare the two in any way."

"In fact," put in Kenneth bitterly, "he 's a fly on the wheel."

"Exactly," snapped the manager, "and if enough flies crowd onto the wheel and buck against it they 'll stop it; and the whole machine as well." He chewed at his cigar and laughed. "I don't usually let out like this, but you 're different and I guess you 'll understand."

Memory moved in Kenneth's brain. Sohmer, too, had told him that he would understand. "Yes, I follow," he hazarded.

"Then I guess you 'll see where the big question mark is; but before I make you my proposition, I want your undertaking that it won't be discussed with any one—in any event."

"Except the owner?" grinned Kenneth.

"Lord, yes—you wouldn't say that if—" Pethick broke off suddenly.

"All right. You have my word." The vision of Sylvia's return was dancing through the young man's brain.

"Then here, like everywhere else, the variable factor wears overalls. What causes the friction I can't always determine. Sometimes it 's wages, and sometimes just one trouble-maker, who according to their own curious system, has to keep in the limelight by stirring things up, or else the unions depose him. Labor will go along as smooth as silk,—then, without a notice break out all over the shop. I believe,—" Pethick spoke slowly and

carefully—"that if I could know who the trouble-makers were and could either fix things up with them or else get rid of them, the thing would most always peter out. But there's always talk first—a lot of it—and that does n't reach me. Now do you see what I'm driving at? Look here, Anderson," concluded the manager abruptly, "I'm going to put the cards on the table, because your sort does n't turn up very often, and I want to move you ahead just as fast as I can."

"It's your deal." There was a subtle change in Kenneth's voice.

Pethick leaned forward, both elbows on his desk, while his eyes became hooded like those of a gliding hawk. "I want to know what's going on in the factory," he said with cool deliberation.

The young man leaped to his feet, white with rage.

"Damn you—"

Pethick did not even move. "I thought you'd go off half cock," he interrupted. "It's a darned easy thing to shut this factory down on account of labor troubles, and it's a darned hard thing to keep it running in spite of 'em. Now the best friend of the workingman is the fellow who tries to keep him out of strikes instead of helping him to get into them. If I know what's coming, there'll be no strikes; but if I don't, this factory may be

shut down any minute and five hundred people thrown out of work. The mill hand just knows enough to make him dangerous, not to us, but to himself, for, mind you, we can stand it longer than he can. In the back of his head he knows that, till some agitator comes along and talks him out of it. As far as you 're concerned, you can blow off, or blow up, I don't care, but I 've given you an inside view of the labor question as it actually is, and you don't get that every day in Canada or anywhere else. Now, John Anderson, drive on."

For a moment Kenneth was too furious to speak. But Pethick's face was so sphinx-like that a strange and kindred calm began to spread over the lad's hot anger. The boss had played his cards; that was something. He himself could appeal to the owner, and his heart leapt at the thought. Till then he could be wise and crafty, like Pethick, knowing what to guard against. Simultaneously he had a vision of Sohmer, and the door the latter was to open that very night. But here was another and different door, opening in the opposite direction. Automatically he took Pethick's cigar from his mouth and dropped it in the ashtray.

"What do you offer?"

"What do you say to double wages and draw the surplus here and not through the payroll?"

"You can do your own dirty work," snapped Kenneth. "You've come to the wrong shop." He reached for the door handle. "Perhaps I'll come back and perhaps I'll speak to the owner, and perhaps I'll do both." He paused. "Does all this make any difference to my job?"

Pethick laughed carelessly. "Not a darn bit, John Anderson."

For the rest of the day Kenneth went about his work silently, keeping out of range of Sohmer's glance. He felt that he was being ground between opposing millstones and would be utterly crushed should they approach each other more closely. At supper time Sohmer was visibly preoccupied, while Greta cast anxious glances at the two men. Presently Kenneth went up to his own room and stood irresolute at the window. It was black outside and dark in his own brain. Then Greta's voice sounded behind him. He turned quickly and saw her, pale and agitated.

"Please, I must speak. You will not be angry. But you must not go with father to-night."

"Why not?" Their eyes met for an instant.

"Because," she faltered, "there is always trouble afterwards. It was for such meetings that we came here, and we will go on again. It has always been like that. Ah! you will not go."

"What do you mean?" He felt a throb of reck-

lessness, but yielded to her beauty and appeal. She was like a virgin Niobe, dissolved in alarm.

"It is not father, he does much to keep the others from trouble. But it was the same in Warsaw, and in Spain and in Pittsburg. There were meetings there too, then came riots and many were killed. Oh! I am afraid." Her breast heaved stormily.

The lad's heart beat a shade quicker. Yielding to a swift impulse, he stooped and kissed her. "There 's nothing to be afraid of, Greta."

Sohmer was waiting on the porch. "We start now," he said quietly, but there was a curious light in his eyes.

CHAPTER IX

SOHMER walked slowly, his head bent forward and his hands clasped behind his back. He did not speak. They turned into a familiar street at the end of which loomed the factory, and here the giant wheeled and struck up a narrow lane. Presently he stopped, opened a gate in a high, wooden fence and rapped at the rear door of a house. Inside was heard the hum of voices.

The door opened the fraction of an inch. "It 's all right," said Sohmer; "with a friend I come."

The door opened wider and Kenneth caught a glimpse of Peters, gripping the handle. "A new man, yes," put in Sohmer, "but a good man, so this way."

Peters stood aside. In the next room Kenneth saw a group around a large kitchen table. There were two vacant chairs. A murmur arose when the second figure appeared, but the big man took no notice. "You will listen," he said with a smile, "and with yourself the rest lies."

There were now seven in the room. Sanders sat, lean and scowling at the other end of the table, beside him Erickson, a big Swede from the boiler

house, whose vast strength Kenneth had noted and admired. Then came Trufitt, an Englishman who ran the biggest hydraulic press; and Miller, a small, large-headed, delicate-handed mechanic from the machine shop. There was a silence, till Peters bolted the door and returned to his chair. Kenneth felt the steady stare of questioning eyes, while from above the hushed crooning of Peters' wife and the soft creak of a cradle filtered into an atmosphere that was strangely tense. Kenneth glanced at the massive figure of Sohmer. The big man stretched his great arms on the table.

"Before business," he began, "you see, my friends, we have here a stranger. For the present he in my hands is, are you satisfied?"

There was an awkward pause. "You 'll go good for him?" put in Miller crisply.

Sohmer nodded. "Of him perhaps we shall have need. Now for the rest, we have much of which to speak, but first of Perry."

A suppressed, half-angered sound ran round the table, as though venting some motion that rankled deep in these men's breasts. Yes, they understood about Perry.

"It is well with his family," went on Sohmer, "and with Perry it must be well too," he added gravely. "Those who know do not speak, so his wife will never know. That is merciful. I think

it is well for us to remember him. For of us may be asked something like he has given. So. The secretary will report."

Peters unfolded a letter and pushed it across. "You of this already know," continued Sohmer, "and whatever you decide you will be helped by our friends in Pittsburg and Chicago. Now what is in your minds?" He glanced round the table.

Kenneth waited, thrilled with excitement. He could decipher in these faces swift signals of that which was rampant in each man's brain. Strong faces were they, grim with labor, fortified by years of endurance, and in all there glimmered fragments of a prophetic flame that redeemed them forever from the commonplace. Sanders, stern, aquiline, remorseless; Erickson, placidly implacable; Miller, keen, intuitive, resourceful; Peters, restless and imaginative; Trufitt, susceptible to that hoarse fury that seizes a Saxon mob. What was not possible with these men behind it! He caught Peters's glance cast meaningly on Trufitt.

"We have been talking about three years now," began the latter unevenly, "and we ain't done nothing but talk. That 's the size of it as I see it. Now we've all of us been in the factory ten years anyway, except Sohmer. That 's right, ain't it?"

His eyes roved round the room as though to extract from each mind that which would best for-

ward his argument. "In ten years the cost of living has gone up fifty per cent. and my wages are up ten per cent. Now I 've gone about as far as I can go, like the rest of us. I know I can't get any further. Pretty soon I'll start down hill. There's nothing ahead of me but that, and we've stood it long enough. I say strike." He rapped out the last words defiantly, and turning glared into Erickson's face. "Eh! What do you say?"

The Swede plucked at his beard. "Winter is coming," he put in grimly.

At this there was a perceptible hush, while the rocking cradle overhead resounded clearly. It seemed to answer Truitt. Sohmer heard it with the rest, and pointed a steady finger at the ceiling. "You go too fast, my friend."

Sanders swore viciously. "By God! You've been saying that for years. Next spring it will be the same, and the next, and the next. What are we here for, anyway? We've got the whole factory behind us and what more do you want? Of course it will cost something, but so does anything that's worth having." He sprang to his feet and with nervous hands pressing on the table stared into Sohmer's eyes. "Are you with us, or are you not?"

But Sohmer only smiled sadly. "You a single

man are, my friend, but you"—he wheeled on Peters—"how much money have you saved, and you, and you?" He took in the group with a gesture. "Strike, yes, when all other means have exhausted, but not till then."

"Look here," said Miller nodding sagely, "the whole thing is, do we weaken ourselves by waiting? So far as concerns the machine shop, it 's all right; they 're only asking for orders. But—" he paused, plunged in profound thought as though he had indeed visualized all that was involved. Sohmer was watching him. Sanders, still standing, his brows knitted, was biting nervously at his thin lips. Erickson lay back regarding Sohmer through half-closed lids, with a glance eloquent of his readiness to follow wherever a man like this might lead. For the time they had all forgotten Kenneth, who now felt like a chip swinging on the edge of a strengthening maelstrom.

"I don't for one want to be unreasonable," broke in Trufitt huskily, "and I don't say that we 've got all the right on our side, but, by the Lord! we 've got most of it. I don't curse the owners for making money out of me, but I'm damned if they 're going to clean it all up except fifteen dollars a week."

Erickson nodded grimly. "That 's it. Things are fixed so that we don't have anything over.

Christ!" he added solemnly, "what it would feel like to have something over."

"What I was going to say is that I'm getting this stuff off my chest because it may help afterwards just to remember that I said it," resumed Trufitt impressively. "Oh! I see it all, believe me, and I'm no quitter when things get started, either." His cheeks turned suddenly red and a dull gleam awoke in his eyes. Then he wheeled swiftly and stared in Kenneth's face. "Say, young fellow, before we get any further, you'd just as well let us hear where you stand."

The lad caught his breath. Listening to these men he had been tremulously conscious of what Sohmer had said. The door was to swing open wider, that was it. Now the door had swung, and he had glimpses into depths that left him marveling. Not as kings and emperors but as gnarled mechanics, this group was deciding affairs for countless others. Hunger, suffering, the blasting of hopes, the abasement of dearly bought pride, blood, imprisonment, and even death, these things hung in the balance, and to appease a natural petition of existence there was only necessary, what? Good faith, confidence, and a sum small in itself but nevertheless one that the management would regain in coin beyond price. Kenneth had a searing glimpse of Sylvia—Sylvia on the Riviera,

Sylvia in London and Paris, Sylvia spending money like water. He shrank involuntarily. Could he ever explain, teach her, humanize her beauty. All this passed through his brain in a flash. With sudden discomfort, he felt Trufitt's gaze still fixed upon him. The room had become strangely quiet.

"I think," he said unsteadily, "that I 'm with you."

"Think!" snapped Miller, half rising.

But Sohmer only nodded. "Yes, that is good. He thinks. Perhaps not before has he thought about any of these things. Perhaps," he went on significantly, "he only on the street used to pass the workingman and wondered how it must feel to be like that. I am satisfied. And you, my friends, I ask you to think also. It is so easy to strike."

Trufitt shook his head. "I 've done so much thinking that my head swims, and I 'm for trying something else. Say, Sohmer, I only want to be happy. That ain't unreasonable, and I 'd take a hell of a chance for it."

"What about spring," suggested Peters with a quick bird-like glance.

"No good, you can't strike in spring," interrupted Sanders; "t 'ain't natural. I guess it 's coming before that."

"My friends," interposed the giant, "my advice is, once again, wait. The wave breaks on the shore with much noise, but it is broken. When we strike it will be against something that is very strong and has the law on its side; the law that our fathers and we have voted for. A machine we cannot fight with our bodies and than this, what else have we?"

Erickson sighed profoundly. "—Justice."

"Yes, it is well said." Here Sohmer paused and his voice took on a deeper note. "The day will come when justice with a sword will be armed. But till then—"

His words died out as though dwindling in pursuit of thoughts that spread into an immensity of space. How far his soul traveled at that moment no man can say, but indubitably it did desert him for the instant, and left his gigantic frame untenanted. And it seemed also as if some consciousness of this weighed upon the others as they sat motionless, waiting for their leader's speech to return. Presently he resumed in tones suffused with emotion and touched with something akin to awe. "We shall do," he said gently, "what many men have tried before to do, but first must we know that the way is clear. So, very soon, you my friend of the machine shop, and you, Trufitt, will talk with Mr. Pethick and—"

A growl sounded round the table, so deep, so

vindictive, that in a flash Pethick was revealed as he existed to this potent assembly. There was that in it so inhuman that Kenneth had a vision of crushed bones and torn flesh. A moment later, glancing at the high resolve in these men's eyes he wondered whence the growl had come.

Sohmer's hand lifted in deprecation. "We three will then talk with Mr. Pethick. What we shall say I know not yet, but when the heart is ready words do not lack at the right time. What he will reply I think I know, but one more chance he must have. If take it he does not, it is for us to do our duty, and I do not think,"—here he gazed steadily at Sanders—"that to strike will be this time with the spring out of tune. So, is it well? Will you, Peters, not wait till the cradle upstairs need no longer creak? Wise men before a race breathe deeply and long."

There was a rumble of assent. Sohmer after all was master. He smiled gravely. "That is settled. It is well that I see Bennett first; he understands and will arrange. There is now one other thing of which you have already heard."

The mechanic nodded. "The efficiency engineer."

"Yes, that is so."

"What's that?" put in Peters sharply.

"An efficiency engineer," said Miller grimly,

“is a man who puts your immortal soul in a box and says, “Don’t get outside that because it’s a waste of energy and a dead loss to the company.””

Sanders leaned forward. “If there’s any of—”

The rest was lost as there sounded from the adjoining factory the hoarse roar of a whistle. So close was it, so deep, that the very walls of the room seemed to quiver, while the atmosphere took on weight and substance. Five short blasts, then the sound of racing feet.

“Fire—the millroom,” gasped Sanders. “Say, do you suppose some fool has—”

“No,” shouted Sohmer, vehemently; “you do not know what you say. Come, let us help.”

There was a rush for the door, then up the lane. Secrecy, caution, vanished in an instant. Sohmer tore into the street and reached the factory gates panting. The others were at his heels.

A lantern danced toward them and the night watchman came up breathless. The office door banged and Pethick ran across the quadrangle. He had been working late.

“Where is it?” he called.

The watchman grinned foolishly. “False alarm, came in from the millroom, guess the wires got crossed. Just been over there, nothing doing.”

Pethick swore with relief, and, turning, saw Sohmer and the others. "Hullo, how did you fellows get here so quickly?"

"We were near here, very near," said Sohmer with dignity. "That it is no worse I am glad."

"That may be. I guess we 're all glad. Quite a representative gathering." His voice took on a note of suspicion. "Most folks seem glad to get away a little farther after six o'clock." He checked himself sharply and, after another glance that swept the group, turned on his heel. The watchman waited till the office door opened and a slim figure was outlined on the step.

"I guess the fire reels are about due. Stop them down the street, you fellows."

Sohmer moved from the gate, deep in reflection. The others dropped away one by one till Kenneth walked alone with the big man. Presently the latter began as though talking to himself.

"A false alarm, yes; two in one evening. No fire was there. By and by perhaps the alarm not false will be. Then will come fire, but,"—his voice sank to a whisper—"to put it out I shall not be here."

They reached the house in silence. Sohmer had gone on into the kitchen, when Kenneth, about to mount to his room, felt a touch on his arm. Greta stood, her face flushed, her eyes very bright. She

had on her party dress and there was a ribbon in her yellow hair. In the parlor a lamp glowed softly.

"Come," she said; "come and visit with me."

He glanced at the hand on his sleeve. It was small, strong, and capable, undisfigured by work. The wrist was neat and square, blending smoothly with the soft curve of the arm. This was not the hand, he thought, of the daughter of a working man. She waited, her red lips parted, regarding him with a steady gaze that seemed to demand whether she was not worth a visit. She was blushing, but imperious.

He nodded awkwardly, and sat on the sofa beside her. She hesitated a moment apparently content that his eyes should rest upon her, and spoke with a certain delicate insistence.

"I have many things to ask, so I thought I would receive you as you are accustomed." She glanced at him brightly, till, with a touch of confusion, she reached forward and turned the lamp higher. Against its flame her fingers seemed pearly and translucent. "You know so much about people that I don't know, so I want to make sure that what I am doing is right. My trouble is that I feel too much and show it. It's hard not to, but the people, the girls, I mean, that you know; they don't show it, do they?"

Kenneth, yielding to this swift translation, paused to answer. He had a moment's wonder whether the people he knew did not suppress themselves perhaps too much. "Some do, and some don't," he compromised. "They vary so much."

"But a girl, should she?"

"It is better perhaps than it is to pretend something you don't feel," he parried.

"You would n't do that, would you?" She leaned toward him involuntarily.

"No, not now."

"When one works one does not pretend, is that it?"

"Yes, that 's it," he said soberly.

She paused. "What do you do when you feel there is so much more you would be good for, if you had the chance?"

"What do you mean, Greta?" He was staring at her curiously.

"I mean this. I see many women and something tells me how much they can do, or are expected to do, although some look as though nothing were expected from them. They take, but they do not give."

He laughed. "Yes, there are some like that."

"But the others. All their lives they have been prepared to do these things, so when they are

asked it is easy. They are even taught how to speak and read and walk and sit. So, is this not all true?"

"Every word of it."

"And the bigger things. Sometimes I think they don't do much for their men except spend money, and they are even taught to do that. Don't please mistake me,"—she hurried on, her color rising—"but I feel here,"—she touched her breast—"that there is not anything that I could not do with, oh! so little teaching. You are different from me; yes, I know that, but tell me you understand. You see I talk like this because you are my man." She turned to him calmly, "Nothing can change that."

"Greta, it's you who do not understand," he felt strangely humbled.

"Why?"

"I have told you," he said gently.

She nodded. "Yes, I remember that. It does not alter anything."

"But it does."

"Is she very pretty?" interrupted the girl.

He flushed. "Yes."

"And clever; she can do many things; she reads much?"

"Greta!" he protested.

"It does not matter," she went on imperturb-

ably; "you cannot hurt me by telling me these things. Is she rich?"

"I won't say anything more," he replied doggedly.

There was a pause, during which he felt her glance resting on him. She was extraordinarily placid, he thought, and there was nothing grotesque to her in this inquisition. Her face had taken on a new quality, so that beneath the yellow hair it seemed finely delicate, with a pallor that only accentuated the blue depths of her eyes. Her head, always erect, sprang like a flower from the smooth shoulders, and the soft hollows where her throat met the first exquisite curve of her breast were tender with tiny shadows. At that moment she was transfigured. Came the next question. "You love her, very much?"

"Yes," he said stoutly.

In an instant he was sorry. The blue eyes clouded with pain and the red lips quivered. Almost in a whisper she breathed her last question.

"And does she love you like that?"

There was no tremor in the voice; it was so quiet as to be almost impersonal, and it may be it was this that struck so deep. Kenneth, in spite of himself, repeated it. Did Sylvia love him like that? For the first time he could not answer, and wondered whether in all truth Sylvia could love like

the girl who waited so motionless beside him. Then remorse engulfed him.

"Of course she does."

What was there in his own voice that sounded so queerly? Greta's face had become wreathed in sudden smiles, and her eyes were radiant. But behind this he noted something that brought a strange somberness with it; a vision which warned that a price must be paid for all that is worth having.

"Yes, perhaps, but there is no woman who can love more than I can. You have promised and so has she, but that does not make any difference. I can wait and you must wait, and all the time you will feel that I love you the most. By and by you will tell me that. There is not anything that any girl can be to you that I will not be." She rose and laughed a little unsteadily. "Perhaps this winter you will see that change in me of which I have told you." She turned to the door and bowed with indefinable grace. "Good night." Then with a glance so lingering that it was a caress, she vanished.

He sat for a while listening to a faint humming that set up in his ears. Once again he was superlatively conscious of how much a girl like this had to give. She seemed unexhausted, abounding in stores of prodigal vitality, and capable of every

opulent response. She did not desire to evade anything, however threatening, but rather went forth to meet it with superb confidence. The pulsing body of her began to appear to him as something rich and luxuriant, her bosom which his head had so lately pressed, was a pillow of forgetfulness. He yielded to the thought. It marched quite naturally with the supremely physical life he was leading, a life which though it prisoned him, also sheltered him from curious and cynical eyes. Here, at his hand, was a freewill offering, a surcease, temporary though it might be, but— He moved restlessly and glanced at the narrow stairs where Greta had paused for a moment before she disappeared. Just then Sohmer's great bulk loomed in the doorway.

He entered very quietly and took the chair by the lamp, so that the light filtered into his yellow beard and lit up its tawny depths with little golden flames. His eyes were unusually soft.

"The meeting," he began quietly, "yes, I know you were interested. But what have you taken away?"

Kenneth hesitated. It had been a small meeting, he reflected, but, in a way, a thing of import, and saturated with possibilities. When it came to speaking of it he found it difficult to choose words, being conscious principally of what the meeting

might lead to. Something of this he tried to express.

The great head nodded understandingly. "You will have seen that Truitt and Erickson and Sanders believe that a strike will all their problems settle—but it is not so. From a strike higher wages may come, but always when wages go up so also does the pressure on the worker increase. At the end of the day a little more money there may be, but less of the man will be left over to enjoy it."

"The doctrine of efficiency?" ventured Kenneth with a touch of bitterness.

"Yes, more product for more wages—so it is called by most people. Have you thought that it is only the efficiency of the worker that is considered, and to a certain end? Of the employer there is also an efficiency, but of that not many people have spoken."

Kenneth glanced at him curiously. It struck him that Sohmer was, if not hopeless, at least resigned. The man's mind was vastly superior to that of his fellows, and he carried with him an abiding suggestion of certitude, yet, for all of this, he appeared to be spending himself in combatting argument with argument, in opposing patience to impetuosity, and deliberation to action. What was there behind Sohmer by which he held so dif-

ficult a mastery? He seemed to be waiting for something which he himself saw clearly, but of which as yet no glimpse had reached the others. He was eloquent of destiny.

"It is years since first of these things I thought," the mellow voice began gently, "and of the beginning perhaps you would hear?"

Kenneth leaned forward. "Please, yes."

"I am from Denmark. On a farm I was born and worked till I was twenty. It was not far from Copenhagen. Now it seems good that I worked thus, for on a farm one can have dreams that do not visit a factory." He paused for a moment and a shadow crept into the blue eyes, while Kenneth had visions of the young Sohmer guiding a plow, with the wind coming up out of the North Sea and plucking at his tawny beard.

"After that I traveled to Warsaw," the big man resumed presently, "and worked very hard, and from there to Spain. From Spain I went back to the farm, but it was not any use. Not any more did the same dreams come, for my eyes were hard with knowledge and I could not see. And there I married and I came to America—Pittsburgh."

"And from Pittsburgh to Canada?"

"So."

"Then you won't stay here?"

"It is not so; I think I shall stay. I cannot tell

why. Here are the same things I have always seen since I was twenty, and the same questions, and here perhaps the answer I shall help to make clear."

"Labor?" said Kenneth under his breath.

Sohmer nodded. "Listen. It is not given to any man by himself to find the answer. It is like many men, a multitude, that start from many different points, but toward the same point they all travel. There is a wilderness to be crossed, and each his own trail must make. Perhaps the trails of two or three will join, and a better path provide. Then, by and by, more people that road will take, because from it some of the stumbling blocks have been cut, till after a long while it becomes a highway on which a nation may walk safely. But the names of those that came first will be forgotten. So, is it plain?"

He did not wait for a reply but went on with profound conviction. "How long, you ask, will this highway be in being made? I do not know, but a very long time. A strike will not make it or many strikes, nor even a revolution, and that will come, perhaps, before we think. It is not possible that force will make the world over again and into something gentler, for in a battle the army which wins will love its weapons on account of the victory. To-day the workingman is gov-

erned by conditions, and only by one thing repeated many times can conditions be changed, and that is by evolution. To Erickson and Trufitt I cannot speak like this; they would not understand; but always when I am with them I see not only themselves but millions of others who feel as they feel. Is it well that I talk thus?"

"Go on," said Kenneth hurriedly. He had a sensation that Sohmer was drawing aside one by one the curtains that hung over his very soul, till presently its mysterious spark would be revealed.

"I have no son," the giant's voice dropped almost to a whisper, "but if there were a son to him would I speak as I do to you. Thus have I felt since you came." Again he paused, then, continuing: "To-night at the meeting I was trying to save Erickson and Sanders from themselves. Evolution is not without sacrifice, that I understand, but there is one sacrifice that may help and another that may be wasted."

"And this evolution?" put in Kenneth earnestly.

"It will be complete when men sing at their work, for then not only will the body be free, but also the spirit. When after the day's labor there come dreams and visions, that will be the answer. I have said that as wages increase so also does the strain on the worker, so it is not a matter of

wages only but of many things. And of this, too, I could not speak to Trufitt or Sanders. It is foolish to say that the work of any man is hard or not hard, for all men differ. One way there is to judge of a man's work and this is to see him after the work is done."

He rose as though to go. Instinctively Kenneth put out a detaining hand. The lad's brain was tense with great perceptions that flickered for an instant with amazing meaning, then blinked out and left him groping. Who was Sohmer? The question seemed to batter at his temples.

"You," he stammered; "what brought you here—to this factory?"

The blue eyes softened. "Perhaps, my friend, it was that which also brought the one who calls himself John Anderson."

CHAPTER X

THE John Percivals evidenced no surprise when James left his entire possessions to Sylvia. A parental legacy had brought to each of the sons a few thousands a year, which John, for his part, invested in New York property and, shaking Canadian dust from his feet, migrated to the Continent. Any regret he may have felt at being divorced from so rapidly rising a country was counterbalanced by the fact that money went twice as far as it could in Canada, and that he was rubbing elbows with the world. There were two children, a small flat in Paris, and a tiny villa in Mentone. Between the two latter all four oscillated with annual regularity.

Of Sylvia, her uncle had not thought much before his brother's death. James obtruded himself occasionally in Canadian trade reports, and when traveling compatriots spoke of home affairs the Consumers Rubber Company was mentioned with a taken-for-granted manner that was at least expressive. But when Jackson Chambers wrote and set forth his late client's wish as to his daughter's projected journey, John Percival felt a ting-

ling of long dormant recollections and wondered whether the uncompromising attributes of her father had settled upon the projected visitor.

Julia, his wife, had more mingled feelings, and confessed to herself a certain apprehension. Life as it developed had materialized in a pleasing though modest round of interests, bounded by an income which, though comfortable enough, provided for neither vagary nor extravagance. At the end of every year there were a few hundred francs over. In the course of twenty years these accumulated into a considerable sum and constituted Elspeth's dowry. Elspeth was recently engaged to a young man of admirable ability but no financial inheritance whatever, his capital being, as he said, under his hat. So far, Julia Percival had yielded to that view which places birth before wealth.

But into this small and carefully guarded circle came Sylvia, girded with sharp distinctions. It was a question, concluded Julia, just what effect she would produce on the young people whom she herself was constantly trying to impress that the sense of possession is of the lower order of things and a state of mind is the determining factor in life. That Sylvia should be attracted to Elspeth's fiancé was absurd, and even while she smiled at the thought, Sylvia's letters told her about Kenneth.

What sort of a man, she wondered, was Kenneth, to let such a girl out of his hands for a year?

But a week with Sylvia put another face on everything. Percival had met her at the station, a chastened and dainty creature, who seemed folded in a sudden romance in which her eyes took on a new and petitionary beauty. Before she went to her room that night the continental branch of the Percival family had taken her to its bosom. Percival found himself trying to read into her delicate features some trace of the grim and silent brother of older days. Julia saw in her a flower that had somehow bloomed without a gardener's care. The girl lingered over Kenneth and his unexplainable resolve, and that she accepted it at all seemed only one delightfully mysterious touch out of many. Julia noted that of the factory she said nothing.

Sylvia, as a matter of fact, had been experiencing emotions that left her slightly ashamed of herself. On the voyage over, while still under the shadow of parting, there seemed a refined cruelty in this separation. Kenneth's amazing letters, reaching her in England, brought with them a sudden dismay, allayed only by the reflection that to her wealth all things were possible and that the year to come would be of her own making. Henry Landon, always a nebulous persons, seen even

through the aura of his son, was beyond all help save that he already had. That Kenneth should plunge into a mysterious course and vouchsafe no explanation except that it was for their united benefit, had first astonished, then piqued her. She was not afraid for him, he was too vital for that, but she admitted a twinge of jealousy of circumstances unknown. Now that he insisted on a year of solitary effort, she wondered whether it would not be wiser to assert her own independence, at least ostensibly, till his mood, for such she felt it to be, had subsided into something more mutual and normal.

On top of all this came the startling invitation of Paris and freedom. The discovery that she was rich, and that to be rich meant a thousand undreamed things, seemed in tune with something in the air, and she attacked her feast with an appetite sharpened by the belief that she had much to make up for, and by a curious sensation that a man like Kenneth might even after their marriage lack the abandon she now felt tingling in her veins. It was good, very good, to be alive. Could Kenneth, she wondered, say that?

At the end of the second month she bought a motor car and they journeyed in luxury to Mentone. At her suggestion the Percival villa had been let and a larger one rented. It was, Sylvia

insisted, to be her treat. Percival had smiled quizzically, reflecting that the grimness of his brother James had inadvertently fathered a more unmodulated child than might have been expected, but he did not guess that Sylvia's pride had determined that when Kenneth came over for Christmas he should stay under his fiancée's roof. So she wrote, conscious of a new pride of possession. The letter was delicately imperative and she closed it with a sense of relief.

A day or two later they were driving along the Cap Martin road, when Mrs. Percival leaned forward and glanced at a figure that stood motionless at the water's edge. She turned to Sylvia. "Do you mind stopping a minute? That's Philippe Amaro, I want to introduce him."

Sylvia nodded. "Who is he?"

"The most necessary man in Mentone. Don't you remember you leased the villa from him? He has a private bank here."

Amaro glanced swiftly as they came up.

"Ah! Madame, a thousand welcomes to Mentone. We have been desolated for your arrival."

Julia laughed. "You haven't changed a bit. May I present you to my niece."

Amaro bowed. He was all in white, with a gardenia in his buttonhole. He suggested extraordinary health, vivacity, and a certain ageless

youth that blended with sky, mountains, and the tawny shore beside him.

"I have had the privilege of writing to Mademoiselle, also of securing for her the Villa Anglais. God is very good to Amaro this year, and Mademoiselle is satisfied, I hope."

"It is all exquisite," smiled Sylvia.

His gaze rested on her an instant.

"It is." Then he added quizzically, "Mademoiselle, this car is very fine, but what a morning for a little promenade. Will you not both take pity on a lonely man? Send your car home and walk into Mentone." He expanded his chest. "This is too superb a day for anything else."

Julia chuckled and they climbed down. Amaro, wreathed in happiness, stepped between them. "It is Mademoiselle's first visit to Mentone?"

"Yes, I'm sorry to say."

"And where does Mademoiselle live?"

"In Canada."

Amaro shivered. "*Quel malheur*. It is too far, too cold."

"And Monsieur?" said Sylvia with an amused glance.

He pointed east, where a long, blue finger of land thrust into the purple sea. "That is Bordighiera, I am born there. In the winter I am in Mentone; that is for business. In the spring there

is but one place in the world, Paris. In summer I sometimes try America, and in the autumn I have friends, such stern, kind friends, in Scotland. I envy the American, I am afraid of the Englishman, I admire the Frenchman, and I marvel at the Russian."

"And in consequence he speaks seven languages," put in Julia.

Amaro shrugged his shoulders. "For business that is necessary."

He talked away, nodding, bowing, waving his stick at persons they met. All seemed to know Amaro, and Sylvia glanced at him curiously. He was different from any man she had ever seen. Oxford, service with the Italian army in Abyssinia, years as an attaché in London and Paris, these set him forth in a relief that was made up of a thousand little facets each contributing to his cosmopolitan person. He talked one moment like a diplomat and the next like a gambler. Through it all ran a keen, vivid appreciation of things and people, accentuated by the very grace and swiftness with which he touched on them. Amaro, it appeared, had made an appraisal of life and had no misgivings as to where its values lay. He piqued, charmed, amused, and surprised all in a breath.

They halted at Rumpelmayer's, where the myr-

midons of that notable confectioner were flitting under the plane trees with cups of morning chocolate. "Won't you stay?" said Julia.

He laughed, shaking his head. "Unfortunately I cannot. It is now necessary that I go to my bank to see what the good Lord will do for me in the way of a few francs profit. Money,"—he pursed his lips—"is objectionable but necessary." He bowed, then, turning to Sylvia, added in the most Anglo-Saxon manner possible: "Thanks for a ripping walk. I hope we may soon have another."

Julia Percival glanced after his dwindling figure. "I must tell you about him some day. And I am glad, my dear, that your affections are firmly set. Now what's the news of Kenneth?"

"Oh!" Sylvia looked up quickly. The transition was almost too abrupt, and she caught a glimpse of the amusement that flitted across her companion's face. "I have just written to him. He's coming over for Christmas and should be here about the twentieth. The change will do him good."

"He has n't actually told you what he's doing?"

"No, but he's working in a factory, I know that much. He's getting what he calls practical ex-

perience, which he somehow thinks is going to help us both after we are married. I'll talk him out of that when he arrives."

"I think I know what he feels." Mrs. Percival nodded sympathetically. "He wants to bring something to his wife. Isn't that a good point? Of course this is your affair," she went on with a touch of helplessness, "but—"

But Sylvia seemed to differ. The taste of life was too strong and sweet. It appeared, reading between the lines, that Kenneth was getting too serious, that his letters presented something grim and sobering which did not march well with the light and sunshine of the hour. This was, perhaps, a mood that would vanish when he reached Mentone. Looking back at their engagement, she wondered that so much could happen in so short a time.

Her aunt surveyed her thoughtfully. "Have you any plans, Sylvia? Are you going to live in Brunton?"

"No, anywhere but Brunton. You never saw the place, Aunt Julia."

"And the factory?" queried the older woman, to whom the business of James Percival had always seemed tremendously impressive.

"The factory frightens me; it always did. In-

side of it the machinery seems to groan and the walls tremble with things I don't understand. I'd sell it to-morrow if I could."

"And then, my dear?" persisted her aunt gently.

The girl stretched out her arms impulsively. "This—with Kenneth. Everything I've been dreaming of for months past." Her voice dropped. "I believe I've just begun to live."

As days slipped by it seemed more and more easy to live. Breakfast was always on the terrace. Below the town dipped sharply to the harbor, around which the town curved its narrow, crescent arms. There were glimpses of crooked, cobbled streets, tufted palms, gray-green olive trees, and snowy villas that, dotted irregularly, looked out argus-eyed at the Mediterranean. Beyond, in early morning, one could catch the crystalline tops of the Corsican Mountains, suspended sparkling in the vast belt of the horizon. West and east the edge of the sea crumbled constantly against the emerald land in league-long fringes of lacy foam. Behind all brooded silence, where the foothills lifted brokenly till they merged into the rough flanks of the Maritime Alps. There was an ascending procession of nature, a royal prodigality in which the violet and the palm yielded to the olive, the olive to the pine, and, highest of all, the

pine at last gave place to the austere remoteness of everlasting peaks.

The Percival régime took on, too, this season a less modulated system. So much was possible that had always been out of the question before. A motor car simplified things enormously. In former years there had been carefully planned picnics, arduous climbs up the Berceau, train trips to Monte Carlo and San Remo, all of which provided a complete and dignified, if somewhat reserved, satisfaction. But now Elspeth Percival found herself hurried into a new frock and motored to Nice for dinner; or noon discovered her unpacking hampers in far valleys with a careless abandon born of the certainty of being whirled back again when she would.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER he had known Sylvia for a month, Amaro essayed what was to him an entirely novel task, that of taking himself in all seriousness to pieces, examining the parts, and reassembling them. Somewhat to his surprise, there was difficulty in the reassembling. He had up to this time regarded life as a dinner of many courses in which it was only natural to skip those that seemed least tempting. But he had invariably made the selections with admirable taste. Women, being of the natural order of things, were surveyed with the same critical eyes, and the reason that he had never married was merely due to the fact that women collectively had proved so amazingly interesting that he feared a falling short in the individual. He did not, nevertheless, overrate himself. He was fully aware that position, charm, and acceptableness are more often a matter of development than of a God-sent nature which levels all barriers. The world, as he saw it, was populated by two breeds, of which but one was worth while, and it was his persistent aim so to contrive that the affairs of his life might naturally

move within the chosen circle. He was neither a snob nor a *poseur*, but by the time he was forty it was perfectly evident that there were a vast number of things in the world which blended with the color of his own views, and that to be diverted from them was an error both of judgment and of taste.

His private bank in Mentone had for recent years occupied his winter months. He conducted its affairs with such good humor and understanding of the traveling Anglo-Saxon that it was a profitable business. Analyzing his yearly statement, Amaro reflected with a musing regret that he should have by now been a rich man. A trifle less sentiment, a little more firmness, a less keen sympathy with the stranded tourist, this was all that was necessary. But year after year young men with distress in their eyes came into his private office and asked for a few hundred francs. There were difficult moments when imploring women invoked Heaven to witness their resolution to risk no more on the spinning wheel. Amaro smiled involuntarily as he remembered some of the names attached to the pile of petitionary letters in his private safe. But always he capitulated. There was something in these opulent skies that made it impossible to refuse. The men had mumbled their thanks and relief and the

women had smiled through their fright and looked unutterable things, and Amaro had always got up to close the door behind them, wondering what excuses he would make to his mother for doing what he knew he would do many times again.

Julia Percival and the Contesse Amaro made an excellent contrast; the one taking an almost austere satisfaction in the view that the things she could not afford to do were generally not the things she would care to do in any case, the other enlivening her old age with joyous friendships selected as the procession of life passed her doorstep. At the moment when Julia was raising barricades, the Contesse was building bridges, for being an aristocrat she could afford to build them. She regarded her son with pride and infinite understanding, chastening his generosity and loving him for it all the more.

By this time the fact that Phillippe was unmarried had ceased to be a compliment to herself. She pictured him a smiling wanderer to friendly doors, but a wanderer whose hair was silvered. Then Mrs. Percival had brought Sylvia to see her. She had been interested in Sylvia. Aware of the girl's wealth, her continental mind had demanded to know whether she were qualified to use it. This query was uppermost in her brain while Sylvia sat beside her. Ultimately she decided that,

though extraordinarily undeveloped, she could easily be modulated into the proper setting for her fortune. It was in her favor that so far she did not guess at her own possibilities. But who, conjectured the Contesse, was qualified to make the most of such promising material? If Phillippe were only not so diffuse in his attentions.

Phillippe himself had become conscious of the same reflection. His excursions had discovered innumerable women, but most of them were *fin de siècle* and offered no invitation to further exploration. What he really wanted was one who had the capacity for being molded into a composite creature whose person would embrace those delightful qualities which his experience had taught him to value and admire. She should also, he had decided, be a woman of means, that between them they might demonstrate that money has nothing to do with a charming method of life, for early in his own career Amaro had recognized that only the possession of wealth could make him superior to it. His code was, in short, so carefully compiled that no part of it had been adopted till he had seen it put in successful operation by those of whom his critical taste approved.

In the course of two months he acquired certain impressions about the youth to whose arrival Sylvia looked forward. Kenneth was, she informed

him, getting practical experience in Canada. She had added, with a laugh that did not ring entirely true, that Kenneth's plans, while no doubt quite admirable, did not seem very complimentary to herself.

Amaro had said little. Practical experience was to him that which enabled one to approach more nearly the ideal method of life. Machinery, for instance, might be less practical than a dinner at Nice with a drive back over the Corniche Road. But being wise, he only by imperceptible degrees made himself more companionable than ever. The lover would come, and then he would retire, but as one who had established a standard of gallantry to be lived up to.

Sylvia expected Kenneth a week before Christmas. When informed of this, Amaro thought swiftly and suggested with a grimace that, since the hour of his extinction was approaching, they should dine with him in Nice and stop at Monte Carlo on the way back.

Sylvia hesitated. She had a curious sensation that she should keep herself for Kenneth. "Would Amaro perhaps wait till he could join them?"

He flung out his hands in affected horror. "What! I wait for the coming of one who will consign me to a perdition of loneliness? Made-

moiselle, I am not made of stone. I am not perhaps practical like your fortunate one, but—”

But Sylvia held her ground. Amaro glanced at her depressed, then he laughed. “To dine at Nice is, of course, nothing, but I had thought you might like to see Monte Carlo from the inside. However,”—he hesitated—“Mademoiselle is going to be so happy that anything I could do would be superfluous. And since this is so, may I say just one thing, a friend to a friend.”

Sylvia smiled and nodded. “Of course, but you are not superfluous.”

“Dear lady, I question whether Canadian women are interested in men. In a man—yes, but not in men. To be thus one must be, so to speak, cosmopolitan, and young nations have not yet learned that one can be virtuous as well as cosmopolitan, therefore they are merely virtuous. It is very sad. You will shortly be married and set forth on the great voyage. I have watched these embarkations with amazing interest; they are so magnificent, so courageous. But, Mademoiselle, let me offer just one small bit of advice. There is something in you which is so essentially yours, and every woman’s, that you must not surrender it. It is the one thing which that admirable dame Providence means all women to keep. It is your individuality—yourself. Do not allow your soul

to be swamped by the existence of this too-fortunate young pirate who comes to claim you. You will soon understand all there is in him, since he is, as you say, practical, for all practical men are open books to their wives. But he must never understand all there is in you. And so, Mademoiselle, I kiss your hand." Then Amaro bowed profoundly and disappeared.

Sylvia from her window watched him turn into the ilex-bordered path that led to the gate. She was rather breathless. He had piqued and aroused her, and now he did not even look back but, stooping, selected a violet for his buttonhole and walked briskly out of sight. She had invariably avoided any contrast between him and Kenneth. It was too palpably unfair, but she was nevertheless conscious that the first ecstasy of her engagement had begun to lose something of its romance. She perceived that Kenneth would require to bring something more than affection to their next meeting. A wave of compunction enveloped her, in the midst of which Mrs. Percival entered with unusual animation.

"Here's a cablegram, Sylvia—well, when does he arrive?"

She opened it with a quick sense of relief. This was something definite, some holding ground to cast anchor in. Presently the sheet slipped from

her fingers and she turned, staring out of the window. Her lips were compressed.

Julia went to her swiftly. "What is it, dear?"

But Sylvia was already moving unsteadily to the door. "Read it," she said dejectedly.

Some hours later, Phillippe Amaro, sitting in the loggia of his mother's tiny villa, leaned forward and taking her long, white hand began to stroke it delicately. "*Mater mia*, I want to talk to you."

The Contesse regarded him thoughtfully. "You 've made more bad business, my son."

"No, no bad business, though perhaps I may be a little more involved. You will remember I told you my invitation to the Percival family was declined this morning, Mademoiselle La Canadienne being unwilling."

"Yes, Phillippe, she was perhaps quite right."

"Possibly, but women are only always right when they are sixty-five. But now she accepts."

"That is very curious. Why?"

"I do not know."

His mother's eyes began to twinkle. "You have suspicions?"

"She perhaps likes me better than she thought."

The Contesse nodded. "I can remember several women who discovered that. But in this case—you know, Phillippe, it is very difficult for an old

person to tell when you are in earnest, and still more so for a young one, and I have often wondered whether the day would come when—”

Philippe chuckled softly. “It has come— Ah! so many times and always the husbands came, too. Now again it comes and behold, *cara*, a distant lover who dashes across the Atlantic for a week-end. That sounds,” he added, “more like a Frenchman than a Saxon. Nevertheless, he dashes.”

“And if there had been no distant lover, my son, what then?”

Amaro lit a cigarette and surveyed it with profound attention. “Miss Percival,” he said slowly, “has great possibilities. She is, I think, cold and will not awaken temperamentally unless with a man who is so sure of himself that he can humor her. She could be made effective, very effective, and is a good sportsman. The Puritan still survives in her, and you know how fascinating that is with a good figure, an excellent skin, and a pretty frock. It is a cold flame, but a flame for all that, and it attracts the moth. She has not had her money long enough to acquire false ideas about it, another distinct advantage. I am very fond of her and already feel that which assures me that, should we marry, I would in a short time be very much in love with her. Naturally it is impossible

for any man to reach that point until he does marry. And that," he concluded, "is about as far as I have got at present."

"Don't," pleaded the old lady; "you hurt me, too, Philippe."

His mood changed on the instant. "I am sorry. How fortunate it is—I speak quite seriously now—that when the good God made Philippe Amaro, He whispered to Himself, 'I will make him palatable but not desirable. He shall be friend to many but lover to none; except to the most enchanting woman in the world, he shall be friend and lover and son and all else.' Eh! *cara*? You see, I'm perfectly sane now."

But the Contesse only grasped his brown hand and held it firmly. "I fear, my son, that when nature ends our *entente* I shall leave behind me a very lonely man. Might it not be as well to be less of a perfectionist?"

"Being your son, that is impossible." He got up abruptly and stared out across the harbor.

His mother sat silent, and there was something transcendent in the gaze that rested on him. Since Philippe had been a boy few had known what he actually felt. It was not, he considered, good form to show it. But the Contesse had never been deceived, though even with her he maintained his badinage. Her glance dwelt fondly on his

straight figure, dark brown eyes, firm and delicate chin, and lips that molded so quickly into smiles. She had grudged him to the world at large, but now she would not grudge him to the right woman. She was conscious of something that approached resentment for Sylvia.

"You go to Milan next month," he said suddenly.

"Yes, Philippe, unless—"

"No, don't change. I shall of course be here, but in April I shall try Algiers."

And with that all his cheeriness returned. A day or two later he learned that Kenneth Landon was not expected for Christmas. The Contesse heard it too, and a flush mounted in her faded cheeks. She looked at her son curiously, but when he left to join his party she said nothing.

Sylvia had insisted on motoring them all over, and the car was at the door of the Villa Anglais when Philippe arrived. At the sight of her he caught his breath, thinking she had never looked so radiant. Her expression had a new quality that enchanted him.

They dined at Helder's. On the way back he felt in tune with the slack sea that lispied beside the lower road. They slid through Monaco. Passing the Casino, he stopped the car. "Let us go in."

But John Percival had a horror of Monte Carlo. Tragedies, he asserted, occurred here every moment, and it was a matter of pain that respectable people passed the threshold. He held forth from the front seat of the car, pink, gesticulating, and fortified by a remarkable dinner. Julia prodded him without effect, while Sylvia's eyes wandered to the swinging doors that emitted a faint perfume to blend with the odors of the wide and dusky gardens. Presently Julia turned to her with a bonhomie that had its unconscious birth at Helder's three hours before.

"You have n't seen it, my dear, and you ought to see it. Monsieur Amaro will take you through the rooms and we will wait here." She settled luxuriously back and her eyes closed.

Philippe's heart beat a shade faster and he spoke rapidly to Sylvia. She hesitated, then nodded.

"Madame," he said, "I have arranged with your niece that I will send for my ponies to meet us at La Turbie, and I will drive her home by the Corniche Road. It is a matter of an hour. So do not wait; we follow at once."

Her aunt glanced at Sylvia, and the car moved forward. Quite unconsciously the girl slipped her hand into Amaro's arm. "Now please show me everything."

He began to laugh. "So often as I come, I think of my first visit. I had walked over from Mentone and when I presented my card, the official looked at my clothes and remarked with great politeness, '*Monsieur, il faut que vous quittez vos pantalons.*' You see," he chuckled, "I was wearing knickerbockers. So I bought others and the Casino paid for them, and that is the secret of a successful visit to Monte Carlo; make the Casino pay for it."

Sylvia looked puzzled. "But how?"

"Stop when you are ahead of the game. Every one should be at one time ahead of every game, even that of life. The great puzzle is to know when to sit tight. Now observe that old woman by the right of the croupier, she plays there every night. Let us watch. Stand here behind her. You see," he whispered, "she has a system. She plays odd and even, and after the odd turns up so many times it is a certainty that the even will follow. She does not gamble, she calculates, and as a result she makes on an average forty francs a day for months. In fact, Mademoiselle, she has solved the riddle of existence." He paused and added with a subtle note in his voice, "She knows what it is wise not to do."

Sylvia glanced at him curiously. "Go on,

please. And all these others; they will lose? As for myself, I am not tempted at all."

"Look," said Amaro, "just opposite."

Across the table was a tall young man, his eyes fixed on the slowly turning wheel. On his high, thin cheek bones two hectic spots flamed out in sharp contrast to the peculiar pallor of his skin. With lips parted and narrow shoulders heaving at his regular breathing he seemed transformed into some transient spirit that hung suspended above the green and fascinating board. Presently, looking up and catching Amaro's gaze, he blushed hotly. His stare dropped again to the spinning ball.

"Consumptive," murmured Amaro. "He won't pull through this winter. His father knows it, but the lad wants to die here. He can't afford to live here, and his people are ruining themselves to gratify his last whim. To-morrow, and again next week, he will come to me for more money and will get it, and then he will stop coming altogether. That little woman next him—"

He broke off suddenly and added with an amused glance, "Here, Mademoiselle, one sees nature in a state of *décolleté*. You wish perhaps to play a little. After, if it pleases, we shall drive to Mentone."

"Let us go now," said Sylvia unsteadily; "that boy's face—please."

"By all means. We shall walk through the gardens as we go to the Funiculaire that will lift us to La Turbie. You will not see the Gardens but one can feel them at any time."

The night air met them on the threshold, and it seemed they were engulfed in a dusky maze from which floated a bland whispering of palms and a riot of strange, sweet odors. There was a mingling of shade and shadow, an indistinct perspective of column, clump, and mound, the cloying breath of exotic flowers, and the moist exhalations of the opulent earth itself. It was all extraordinarily seductive, and Sylvia felt her pulse quicken. This was what she had meant to keep for Kenneth. Involuntarily she glanced at Amaro. He was apparently deep in thought.

Presently they struck into the brilliant street. "We go up now and leave the tropics for the temperate zone," he said.

"The part of wisdom," she ventured, with a touch of daring.

"Perhaps. When one does not understand the tropics, it is well to take precautions." He laughed softly to himself.

The Funiculaire railway, clinging to the mountain ridge, lifted them to La Turbie. Amaro's

tandem was waiting at the little hotel that perched astride the ridge. He glanced at it contentedly, and pointed north across the low stone wall that paralleled the road. "And now we look from the temperate zone to the regions of ice."

Sylvia was entranced. From the wall, the shoulder of the ridge fell precipitately to a tangle of ravines. Beyond this the dislocated earth heaved itself into the distance, naked and uncouth, till with one ultimate sweep the tremendous backbone of the Maritime Alps filled the horizon with a medley of glittering peaks. These shone chill, turning a myriad of diamond facets to the cold, blue light of the moon. One could trace wrinkles in their gigantic slopes, miniature cliffs, and pigmy valleys, cut sharp and black. Even across all the the intervening leagues the silence of them spread in the crisp and star-smitten night.

The girl stood while Amaro lit a cigarette. Its flame flickered on his smooth, olive face and awakened a tiny but kindred spark that glowed slumbrously in his dark eyes. He waved a hand at Monte Carlo, then turned toward the north.

"What an admirable illustration! The tropics for a season, but not too long, or one acquires malaria. Then the escape to the frosts; that is the antidote. Finally the journey of existence in the temperate zone. What a mistake to make an

effort out of life without necessity. Effort is not always praiseworthy,"—here he looked at her shrewdly—"and very often unprofitable. And lest Mademoiselle should think me a cynic, she will catch cold if she stares at the moon too long." He gathered the reins and they swung smoothly into the long down grade to Mentone. "Madame Percival tells me that Monsieur Kenneth is not after all expected."

Sylvia started. It was the first time Amaro had mentioned Kenneth by name. She waited for a pang of resentment that did not come and became uncomfortably conscious that for that afternoon Kenneth had not existed.

"No," she said evenly, "I'm very sorry. He is too busy, so we won't see each other till the summer. It's a great disappointment."

"I remember," ruminated Amaro impersonally, "that one day when I was in London and also very busy I received an invitation to lunch at Nice with a very charming person. I went to the office of the admirable Mr. Cook and said 'A return ticket if you please, to Nice.' 'But for how long?' they demanded. 'For three days,' I replied. 'I go there to lunch the day after to-morrow.' The office was full of tourists, such worthy people. They overheard me. What astonishment, what a fixing of stares! 'What fool,' they

asked, 'is this man who travels a thousand miles for lunch?' But, Mademoiselle, I was not a fool. The lunch was delightful. We have not met since, but I would not sacrifice that hour for many railway tickets. It is well sometimes to be a fool, for wisdom is often very sad." He flicked the leader daintily. "Mademoiselle will be married next summer?"

"Yes, I think so."

"And live in Canada?"

"No. Four months ago I did n't know where I wanted to live, but now I do. You see," she added thoughtfully, "I had n't seen very much before I came to the Continent."

"And why?" said Amaro slowly.

"I am afraid there are too many reasons to tell, and really," she confessed, with a smile, "I'm only half educated."

Amaro nodded. "That is so," he answered gravely.

She stared at him. "Just why do you say that?"

"Mademoiselle," he interrupted evenly, "believe me, I do understand. We do not educate ourselves; other people do that for us, and without the other people it is not done at all."

It seemed to Sylvia that he was inevitably right. The day had provided an excursion for her imag-

ination as well as her eyes. She had undertaken it in pique, wondering what new phase of Amaro it might reveal, while the recalcitrant Kenneth was thrust resolutely for the time being into the background. And Amaro had not made a single false move, though now she realized, with amused and inward embarrassment, that she had expected it. She had even pictured the proud surprise with which she would receive it. But, Amaro, sitting very erect, while his hands lifted to the sharp pull of the reins, swung his cart through the tiny hamlet of St. Croix and was apparently interested only in the ring of his horses' hooves and the silvery clink of curb chains. Suddenly she felt that she owed him something.

"I want to explain; it's rather difficult, and you will probably think me very foolish."

He forced his horses to a walk. "*Plait-il?*"

"You see, when I told you I would come to-day I was very angry. Some one had made me very angry and I came out of spite for him. It was n't exactly nice of me to use your invitation like that, but the result is that I have had a delightful day, and—and, I don't know what to do about it. I'm rather ashamed of myself, but I'm perfectly happy."

"Rather ashamed but yet happy," he chuckled. "That, Mademoiselle, is a combination quite im-

mortal. Most of us are happy first and ashamed afterwards. But I knew why you came, and I was quite content. And now," he continued earnestly, "let me too confess. I also have tried an experiment with a friend. At dinner in Helder's restaurant, on the promenade at Nice, in the Casino, you were greatly admired. I was sure this would be so—and—"

"Even though I'm only half educated?" she countered.

"Yes, even so," he put in smiling. "It confirms all my own belief. You see, Mademoiselle Canadienne, all women need admiration. The good God arranged that, and a woman looks on herself very much as she thinks her friends look. And when she is not admired it is impossible that she does herself justice."

"Who told you that?" demanded Sylvia.

"An old, old woman called Experience, who seldom goes wrong. So for the future I trust that you will move only in those places where you are admired. You will be an enormous success because in a few, a very few years, you will be of yourself admirable. And permit one to say that when you marry you must not on any account change more than your name, for the good Lord is prepared to smile on a certain half-educated demoiselle called Sylvia."

He chirruped to the horses and, swaying past Roquebrune, they swerved into the lower road at Cap Martin, till, crossing the ridge, the lamps of Mentone gleamed softly below them. Out at sea the lights of a liner glowed like a cluster of fireflies.

At the door of the villa he jumped lightly down and stood bareheaded. "Mademoiselle, for much that I have said, forgive me. But for much that I have not said," he paused, "give me credit." Then, very formally, he kissed her hand.

CHAPTER XII

THE sending of the cable had hit Kenneth hard, but after a grim searching of heart he found no alternative. Sylvia's letters had been full of expectation. He read them by lamplight in his own room, conjuring visions of the Villa Anglais, set in olives, palms, and orange trees. It reminded him of "magic casements opening on the foam," but his own casements opened on more sober scenes. Slowly he was becoming assured that some elemental part of himself was striking mysterious roots far down into the deeper meanings of life. To his ears there now came constantly a murmur like that of a distant sea—dull, persistent, and almost toneless, but agitated nevertheless by breakers of emotion that lifted themselves high above the surrounding monotony.

His own part of it was still unformed. So far he had not done—but merely done without, and even this meant sacrifice and a loneliness from which he would have shrunk had its shadow preceded it. He dared not think too much of Sylvia, but, trusting in her loyalty and love, looked ahead. And as for Greta—Greta would marry Sanders. In an-

other year conditions in the factory would be so improved that his voluntary exile would seem a small price to pay. His father too was showing signs of returning consciousness. When he was fully recovered, Kenneth would marry. This was to be the way of it all. It was simple enough if one only took time to think the thing out.

So at least it appeared till he received Sylvia's answer to his cable. He got it at the post-office at noon and, after an agitated reading, thrust it in his pocket as he hurried back to the factory. There for a while it gave place to other things. The door that suddenly had opened for him began to swing a little wider. Busy at his machine he heard a voice in his ear,

"Over there in the corner; efficiency expert; get on to him."

Kenneth looked. In the corner a young man ⁷leaned against the wall, apparently doing nothing, but with eyes that roved constantly from man to machine, then back to man again. He seemed to count the revolutions of wheels, the progress of material, the handling and lifting. Sometimes he left his corner and, taking hold of a truck, pushed it himself. Occasionally he timed a batch of work going through a calender, measured distances or heights, and tested weights. Periodically he took

out a note-book and scribbled. It got on Kenneth's nerves to catch his sharp gaze, but no response glimmered on the hatchet face. He moved to different parts of the room, perching in angles like a hawk. This went on for hours. He was so ageless, so silent, that after a while he gradually melted into his surroundings. He might always have been there.

In the course of the next few days the same visitor was observed in every department of the factory. The foreman took no notice of him, but occasionally when Bennett passed the expert stepped forward and they conversed in low tones. It was noticeable that Pethick during this period did not show himself, while Bennett looked awkward, uncomfortable, and sometimes almost apologetic. "You fellows know this is none of my doing," he seemed to suggest.

When finally the expert left, there was a sigh of relief and a long breath of apprehension. The older men shook their heads and declined to talk.

"What of it?" asked Kenneth of Sohmer.

"Yet I do not know. But if it is what we think, it is the beginning of much trouble. Wait, my friend."

And while Kenneth waited, he tried to wrest some comfort from Sylvia's letters, but by now

they were touched with something that was almost resentment.

"You don't seem to believe me," she wrote, "that you are really wasting your time, and besides you have made it very hard for me not to feel hurt. I must confess that I have not got rid of that feeling. I quite admit, as Aunt Julia says, that you are doing something very fine, but I do question whether it is necessary. Don't you see, dear, that you will have very much to occupy you when we are married. I'm not referring to myself. The factory seems to be doing splendidly from the reports I have, and I am told that soon it is going to do better still, so I don't feel that you should think about just your future, but about ours. I have great plans and am longing to talk them over with you, and am thankful I came here. It has taught me much. We can live anywhere we please. Do you know, Kenneth, I feel that you ought to come soon, very soon."

All this struck him with something like despair. Would Sylvia understand when the time came for him to stake everything on her understanding?

It was in midwinter that Pethick, having digested the report of the efficiency expert, summoned Bennett, explained all carefully, and ordered him to put the new way of doing things into action. Bennett only shrugged his shoulders. It

was not for him to protest. But he demanded written instructions.

The day afterwards, Erickson, walking across the courtyard with a bar, ran into the general foreman.

"Where are you going?" demanded the latter.

"Machine shop to get this fixed."

Bennett shook his head. "Don't do that again. Just write out a slip and the office will call for it. The shop will do the rest."

Erickson stared. For fifteen years he had been taking occasional little trips to the shop. It was good to get out of the boiler house for a minute and the work did not suffer. His helper was always on duty. There was time for a brief smoke in the smithy while he swung the big hammer for a change and had a chat with the smith. But now—

He laughed awkwardly. "I guess you're joking, I don't lose any time over this."

"You've got your orders," snapped Bennett, and walked on.

Erickson looked after him, puzzled. Did it mean that he himself was condemned to eleven hours in front of the furnaces with nothing to break the dead monotony? Was the rest of his life to be like this? It suddenly seemed that that stroll across to the shop was a very precious thing. The

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bar dropped heavily from his shoulder into his great, blackened palm, where it quivered like a spear. He stood for a second, his eyes cold with resentment.

All through the factory similar things began to happen. The lower parts of the windows were painted white and the hands could no longer look out and see the trees. It appeared to them now that the occasional glance away from the dusty walls and steaming metal had been of enormous if unconscious benefit. But the efficiency expert had noted that men's eyes sometimes rested an unnecessary moment on the mass of green. The matter was of simple remedy.

Everywhere the workers found that their spheres were strangely contracted. There was no borrowing of tools. What each man needed was there, so placed that by the least movement it was brought within reach. By some strange process there had been eliminated from the daily round everything that failed to contribute directly to the work of production. Some hands had been replaced by automatic machines. These were attended by boys, who sat staring dully at an endless stream of stamped metal. The pieces were even counted automatically.

For a week or so the change was interesting, till a drab silence descended everywhere. Came

also the conviction that production was going up, how much they did not know. Sohmer estimated it at ten per cent., Sanders at more. There was less sweat, but also less whistling. Hands and eyes were more profitable to the company, but the contents of the weekly envelope varied only a little and the struggle for life was as grim as ever. So far Pethick had succeeded in his plan, but the change effected in the factory was deeper than he imagined. Kenneth found himself choking back a flood of protest. The owner's income was mounting. But he had promised himself to wait. The tale would be complete by springtime.

Sohmer said little, though Kenneth often caught the mild blue eyes scanning him closely. He began to feel, too, that Mrs. Sohmer's manner was changing. There were times when he found himself unexpectedly alone with Greta, and the girl was strangely appealing. Her voice was softer and she had acquired ways which he recognized with a start were not those of the daughter of a factory worker. She dressed now very simply, and seemed less opulent, less physical, as though some self-animated process were at work. She was content merely to be near him. Sometimes when their glances met, she turned pale. Always she was anxious to avoid her mother's officious efforts to get them together, and looked at Kenneth as

though to say, "I don't want her to do this, you understand."

There came to him a conviction that he must speak out to the giant. By this time he had conceived something more than an honest admiration for Greta. There were moments when his hunger for companionship gave it a more tender meaning. He had tried not to think of Sylvia and Greta together; it did not seem fair to either.

"I want to tell you something," he began a little unsteadily. "You have all been so kind that I must tell you."

"Yes." Sohmer did not appear to be surprised.

"I have been here six months and feel bound to say something you ought to know about myself. I only expect to work in the factory till June, then I'm going to be married. But," he hesitated, "I am also going to live in Brunton."

"And who is it my friend is going to marry?"

"I can't say. Some one who is not in Canada just now."

"Ah!" The big man laid his paper gently on the table, and the blue eyes clouded for an instant. "It had to be so, yes? Was it hard for my friend to tell me?"

The lad nodded. He was unaccountably moved.

"And the rest, what is in both our minds, it is not your fault? You had considered saying that,

too? You need not answer. Now for a moment I would think."

He dropped into silence. Kenneth heard the clock tick and Mrs. Sohmer's deliberate footsteps sounded overhead.

"How long is it since you of this have told my daughter?"

"Months," said Kenneth dully.

"And my daughter said, what?"

"Must I tell you that?"

Sohmer opened his eyes wider. "What you feel you do not owe, that you will not tell me."

Kenneth colored hotly. "She said that that did not make any difference."

"So. She was right." The giant pulled at his flaxen beard and stared fixedly while behind his eyes moved something mysterious and profound. "It makes no difference at all."

"What do you mean?" Kenneth's voice creaked.

"That which is written will come to pass," sounded the mellow tones, "and it is written what you shall do and not by any contriving of your soul shall you change it. And so with Greta and her mother, and with me myself." His hand went out and lay mightily on Kenneth's arm. "Will you listen a moment, my friend?" he went on with intense earnestness. "As for Greta, I had been

happy had you married her, for Greta is our child but not of us. Do you guess how many millions there are of women who their lives spend in washing, cooking, and the bearing of children, because of them their husbands ask nothing else. All this can Greta do, but if there is nothing else, her spirit hungry will be. Greta has passion, yes, but her soul is very great. Something tells me that whether for you, or some other man, her spirit will not hungry be for long. This much I can see, but beyond this it is dark."

Kenneth had begun to tremble. He dared not look up. The pressure of the massive hand was still on his arm, and it began to seem that there was flowing into him some superlative essence, tingling and throbbing like a light, quick fire in every vein. There came again the unnameable thrill that once before had come in this man's presence. Then, from where Sohmer sat, he heard a voice, halting in its tenderness, poignant in its sweetness.

"There will be many people of heavy labors and there will come trouble and anger and blood. Wisdom against hunger alone will not prevail, but after that will be a sacrifice, and—" his tones dropped to a deeper murmur—"wisdom of sacrifice will be born again. And so on, once more and once more, till, after the night, shall come the

morning.” He paused. “My friend, look at me.”

But Kenneth, quivering and shaking, could not lift his eyes.

CHAPTER XIII

A WEEK after the new rules went into force there was an emergency meeting of the men's committee. By this time the factory was humming like an angry hive. Its atmosphere was vicious. Bennett grew anxious and told Pethick, but the latter only smiled grimly.

"They 're beginning to feel it, eh?"

The general foreman knew Pethick was wrong but was afraid of him, for to Bennett there was something Napoleonic in bossing hundreds of men. He reflected, nevertheless, that his master lacked the wisdom born of workshop and sweat. "I guess it—it—'ud be as well to let up for a while. They 've swallowed all they 're going to swallow."

Pethick opened a drawer and took out the last factory report, but the foreman went on stubbornly. "Oh yes, I know how you feel about it, but what I 'm giving you is from the inside. I 've been there."

"For the last week in February we turned out sixteen per cent. more stuff than we did the same week in November," said Pethick thoughtfully.

"Now you ask me to drop that sixteen per cent."

"No, I don't. Six might fix it—anything—but it ought to be something. Do you suppose I don't *feel* what 's going on?"

Pethick's eyebrows went up. "Oh, yes, I do." He leaned forward across the desk, his face sharper than ever. "Bennett, I've just started. Within the last month I've seen factories where they get a sight more out of their men than we do—even now. Perhaps their machinery is more modern, but"—here his voice took on a touch of triumph—"that's not the big end of it. They run it faster, do you follow me? A darned sight faster."

Bennett shook his grizzled head. "You're not going to try that on here, are you?"

"Why not?"

"Our machines won't stand it, and you know that as well as I do. When Mr. Percival made me foreman, he said 'Bennett, you keep the wheels turning steady; don't overload 'em and don't hurry 'em. It ain't good practice. Metal,' says he, 'gets tired just like folks, but when it breaks it's a sight more serious.'"

Pethick stopped him curtly. "I'm not talking to you of twenty years ago. We've got a big engine that runs the whole show. She makes eighty revolutions. Now if we were to speed her

up eight more the result would be that every machine in the place would do the same thing in proportion." The cold voice went on while Bennett stared fascinated. "The change can be made over night and the only difference will be that some of the old heads will reckon that they are getting a bit slower and stiffer in the joints. I guess that 's all, you can attend to the rest."

Bennett began to be frightened. "Look here," he protested, "you don't understand that our men are trained to the speed they are running at."

"Well, give them a little more training."

"They won't stand it. When a mill 's been running the same gait for ten years the man who looks after it knows it by heart. He knows how much time he 's got to get his fingers out of the way, and, my God!—say, you 're not in earnest?"

"Wait and see," snapped Pethick.

"They 'll walk out. Tell 'em about it and give 'em a chance to get on to it."

"They won't get on to it, and if they do, it 's a good way to sort them over. I 've had that in my head for some time."

"I only want to put myself on record," said Bennett stubbornly. "You 're boss here and you can send the whole place to hell if you like. You do this and something 's going to blow up, and

I don't want to be around when the pieces start to come down. Things have about struck the breaking point already. And now I've got that off my chest." He paused and added diffidently, "Eight revolutions, you said?"

Pethick nodded. Dismissing the subject, he turned to a pile of letters.

The foreman stumped to the door. "There 'll be eight revolutions all right."

At nine o'clock the same evening Erickson, who was on night shift in the boiler room, looked curiously at his steam gage. It indicated a falling pressure. Puzzling over this, he could think of nothing to make it fall. The factory was asleep. Presently a swinging lantern bobbed across the courtyard.

"What 's the matter, Hans?"

"Something leaking; look where the pressure is."

At that moment a dull, familiar rumble spread in the adjoining building while the cough of the big engine sounded softly. The two men stared at each other, and, turning quickly, saw that the engine room was dimly lighted. Erickson stood on tip-toe and peered through the glass partition.

Bennett was beside the crank-shaft pressing a small revolution counter against the spinning

metal. In one hand he held his watch. His eyes roved from this to the engineer who was at the throttle, then to the huge fly wheel that traced gigantic circles in the gloom.

"Slack up," he barked suddenly; "choke her down. She's up to a hundred." The rumble in the outer rooms had increased tremendously.

The throttle wheel moved slightly and the uproar lessened.

"Now, hold her there." For a full five minutes Bennett counted then stepped to the whirling governor and, grasping an adjusting wheel, worked over it swiftly. "Now open her up—go ahead, wide open. That's it. The governor holds her. You understand that if this gets out, you're sacked. Shut your steam off and come on."

They disappeared. Erickson, still flattening his nose against the glass, stared at the engine till into his slow brain the truth filtered like poison.

Five minutes after the whistle blew next morning the affair was common knowledge. It had passed like a whispering wind from room to room. Men regarded their machines suspiciously, letting them run unattended to mark their speed. Bennett, walking through with assumed jauntiness, recognized that the secret was out, while the hands watched him out of the corners of their eyes. They remembered he had risen from their ranks

and were, in consequence, doubly distrustful. It was not that Bennett was a traitor, but he knew too many of the ropes for their comfort. The day passed tensely, and the foremen were unnaturally amiable. There was something in the air that throbbed in every dusty corner. The factory was on edge.

Just before six o'clock Sohmer's fingers were nearly caught, but he snatched them away as the hot metal began to grip. He stared at their pink tips. Bennett, who was passing, stopped and stared, too, while a dark flush rose in his cheek.

"Hulloa, Sohmer, that's a queer trick for an old dog like you. Not hurt, eh?"

The giant looked at him calmly. "No, not yet am I hurt."

"What do you mean?" blustered Bennett.

"What I have said, and sometimes old dogs new tricks learn."

Bennett glanced at him quickly and touched his elbow. "Here a minute. Say, can you come in and see me to-night?" This time it was not bluster, but uncertainty and a touch of appeal. Bennett was quite in earnest.

"It is not time yet." The giant turned to his machine.

That night the five committee men came to Sohmer's house, the same who met before, but yet

not the same. Erickson's blue eyes were blazing. Sanders, nervous and high pitched, was keyed up to revolt. Miller and Trufitt were morose. Sohmer towered where he sat and seemed to have acquired some quality of added mastery to deal with this turbulent group, and even Sohmer was mightily moved. Greta and Mrs. Sohmer had disappeared, but their voices came faintly at intervals. They added to the sense of foreboding that had settled over everything.

Sanders looked at Kenneth with no attempt to conceal his animosity. He turned impatiently to Sohmer as though at such a time a rival was unworthy of notice. "Well," he said defiantly, "are you satisfied?"

"Not quite," answered Sohmer steadily.

"What more do you want?"

"The last time we together were we decided to talk to the superintendent. We did not talk because at that time other matters told us to wait, but now we shall talk. If result comes not, we shall do as you say. Is it well?"

Miller leaned forward. "I understand you are willing to go to the boss and state our case. If he won't come down, then we strike. Is that it?"

"I have spoken," said Sohmer grimly.

Trufitt nodded. He felt a satisfied glow that the

thing was at hand at last. Pethick would not come down; he knew that. So, on the edge of the strike, he luxuriated a moment in the very thought of it. Trufitt was single.

"That suits me," he grunted. "And you, you big Swede?"

Erickson slowly clenched his great fist. He had a woman and two children, but the woman would stand by him. She had done so before. "Ya, that suits me."

"And you?" said Sanders suddenly to Kenneth. His tones lifted insistently into a note both challenging and insolent.

For the next second Kenneth lived at a terrific rate, till through the medley in his brain he seemed to hear Sohmer's voice. But Sohmer did not speak. Then Kenneth heard his own voice. It was quite distinct. "Yes, that suits me."

When he had said this, it seemed also that some indefinable thing reached him from Sohmer, something that fortified and in a queer way consoled and whispered that he had done well. He stole a glance at the big man, but the blue eyes were apparently looking straight through the wall at an object very far off, while his lips moved inaudibly. He might almost have been praying. After that a thought flashed into Kenneth's mind, and while

he was still striving to sort the thing out Trufitt began to talk again, his thick voice purring with satisfaction.

"Say, you fellows, now that 's settled, who 's going to talk to the boss. You, Sohmer—and Miller—and say, what about Anderson? He speaks a damn sight better than the rest of us."

Sanders looked up again. "That 's all right." Then, very deliberately, "Will you go, Anderson?"

Kenneth reflected swiftly, while once more the intangible thing moved within him. He nodded. "Yes, I'll go."

"Ah!" Sanders's tones were like silk.

"Look here," broke in Trufitt, "what do you suppose is behind all this. Has the boss got an interest in the factory?"

"He gets a darned good salary, and I guess old man Percival gave him an interest to keep him," volunteered Miller.

"But the owner gets the big end of it. Say, think she knows anything about all this?"

"The owner does not care," grumbled Erickson; "she 's in Europe spending money like water. Why should she care; don't she get the money?"

"A hell of an owner." It was Sanders's voice, ragged with sarcasm.

Simultaneously a cord snapped in Kenneth's

head. "You 're a liar!" he shouted and lunged savagely across the table.

Sanders gaped in sudden amazement. Still extended, his fists still poised, Kenneth felt a deadly silence settle on the room. So breathless was it that he could not stir. Miller, Trufitt, all of them, were staring at him. In the stare was a suspicion more dreadful than anger.

The seconds passed, till, drawn irresistibly, Kenneth slowly turned and caught Sohmer's eyes. They were brilliant with prescience. Instantly the young man knew that Sohmer had grasped the truth. Here was an interloper, infinitely more dangerous than a stranger, one whose intent was to cross over to the other side armed with all the revelations of his sojourn in the ranks of labor.

But while he still recoiled, the hard light began to die in Sohmer's gaze and was replaced by something inexpressibly proud and confident. It was as though he had flung his whole soul into Kenneth's keeping, and said, "It is yours. I trust you and have always trusted you. You will not betray me now." At that moment something immortal moved in the lad's breast and he knew that he could never betray.

Presently into the silence came the deep voice, level, insistent and throbbing with a new revelation of power. "My friend Anderson hastily has

spoke. It may be we are all hasty to-night. He was not always one of us, but now that the doors of his mind opening are, he begins to understand. What you, Sanders, have said about old Percival's daughter is not so. She does not know because he did not tell her, and now that he is dead who is there to speak? She has not toiled, and there is no comprehension without toil. So, let us forget."

But Sanders gnawed sulkily at his mustache. "He called me a liar, and I 'm damned if I 'll forget."

"Then without me let the work go on." Sohmer rose ponderously.

"Here, you, sit down," growled Truffitt. "Sanders, shut up; you started it anyway. Do you want us all to make bloody fools of ourselves?"

"Ya," chimed in Erickson, "if Sanders wants to fight he will get a bellyful soon."

Peters laughed grimly. "That 's no joke, I guess. Come on, let 's have a new deal. It 's fixed that Sohmer, and you, Miller, and Anderson, put the thing straight to Pethick on Monday and then we decide. If that 's all right, let 's go home; we 'll need all the sleep we can get before we 're through. Come on up the street a bit, Sohmer; I want to talk to you."

That night Kenneth tossed for hours. He could

hear Greta moving restlessly in the next room, and it was not till nearly morning that he dropped into an uneasy sleep. Once he thought she was crying softly. At breakfast on Sunday her eyes were red and she seemed to avoid his glance. In the afternoon he went to Cottingham to see his father.

CHAPTER XIV

FOR seven months Henry Landon had laid speechless in his sickroom. Week after week his dull glance wandered unillumined, except latterly, by any ray of intelligence. In recent weeks there had been a change. Kenneth marked it first in the drawn face where the muscles did not seem so distorted. The fingers, too, lost their trick of plucking at the sheet; there was a slackness, an easing of sinews, a looser articulation of bones and joints. Now when he stooped over his father he noted that his skin was moist, and his heart leaped at a new flicker in the eyes.

"Dad," he said breathlessly, "do you know me?"

The faintest glimmer awoke and disappeared almost instantly.

Kenneth took the stiff palm in his warm fingers. "Dad," he entreated again, "can you move your hand?"

Landon's features molded themselves into a pathetic grimace, but against the lad's palm was a pressure, infinitely slight. Came a step behind him.

"He 's better," he said to the nurse. "I see a change."

She smiled with comforting assurance. "Yes, much. We nearly sent for you last week but we wanted to be certain. You can only expect a little at first. He will get better now, but how much better we can't tell. His brain may begin work again just where it left off, or it may have to do a lot all over again. Look, I think he wants you."

Kenneth stooped again. "Dad, do you understand me? Close your eyes if you do."

There was a poignant moment, but the white lids fluttered slowly down.

"I 'm well," said his son, trembling, "and you 've been sick, but you 're going to get better; is n't he, Nurse?" His eyes sought hers with a petition.

"Yes, he 's going to get well." Her own lips were quivering.

"Is there anything you want, Dad? Everything is all right. Do you understand—all right?" He threw his whole soul into the words, speaking slowly as to a child.

There came the faintest whisper. "Kenneth."

"Yes, Dad."

"I 'm better. I 've missed you." The tired eyes grew brighter.

"I 'm sorry, Dad." Kenneth's heart was

pounding violently. "I could n't get here before."

"Is this a holiday?" Landon smiled faintly.

"Yes, for me. Dad, you are better."

"Yes, but—but I knew you the last time, though I could n't tell you. I feel tired, boy, I—I seem to have had a long journey." The voice trailed out weakly but came in again. "Things don't seem the same now. Is it"—the sick man's gaze took on a curious profundity—"is it the same way with you?"

"Just the same, but you must n't try too much to-day."

"I've had a long time to rest." He paused, then ventured almost inaudibly. "Was it a bad smash?"

"There 's enough left for you, Dad, and I 'm all right."

"Ah!" Landon sank back into his pillows and stretched out a wasted hand. "I wanted too much for you, boy."

As Kenneth bent over him he slipped back into the shadow from which for a moment he had emerged. Then the nurse, well content, interposed. Landon's reason had reëstablished itself, but any further effort would at this moment be dangerous. After a lingering scrutiny, in which memories, submerged for months by living reali-

ties, woke into strange activity, Kenneth journeyed back.

In the little parlor he found Sohmer and Miller deep in conversation. Sanders, it appeared, had been there with Trufitt, arguing as to the demands to be made on Pethick. The big man had a look of unusual fatigue, but he turned patiently and went over the ground with Kenneth. He spoke as one who considered not a single possible strike but many. Ignorance, he claimed, was at the bottom of it all, rather than the deliberate desire of one section to rob another.

“Of education it is largely the fault,” he ruminated. “Of humanity how little study is there! It is the product of humanity that is taught, and what we are to do in working hours. But what about those hours in which one does not work? Evil cannot come to the man who is busy and at the same time happy. The Church”—here his voice lowered and a shadow moved in his eyes, “the Church should do that, but—”

“The Church,” broke in Miller coldly, “what do I get out of it?—what does it offer me, anyway? A seat on Sunday, if there is no crowd, and I hear a doctrine of love and peace, while I know darned well that the place is full of people who would n’t have me sitting beside them if they could help it. Lot of love in that, is n’t there? I tell you,”

he went on, his tones rising, "the Church expects us to spend most of this life preparing in some way or other for another on which there 's no information. They have n't any details to give out. As for the rest of it, the Church is n't represented on the bench, or in the law, for our law is one of force and that don't jibe with what the Church preaches. Does religion help me to get a better wage or keep down the cost of living? Not much. Will it stand up to an employer if he is a bad lot, and tell him he 's a crook and a thief? I don't think so, for likely as not he 's a good subscriber. I don't subscribe. We 've got what we call civilization and I guess religion takes a good deal of credit for it, but it don't prevent me getting a year for stealing food if my children are hungry, while the man who is civilized enough to steal a million and keep inside the law gets the glad hand from every one he knows. And what 's more, supposing I 'm only a boy and I steal, I 'm thrown into a crowd of criminals who will see to it that I 'm as crooked as they are when I get out. My punishment for a first offense is that I 'm chucked into a place where I 'm surrounded with crime, and in order to cure me of it I 'm stuffed with the knowledge of more crime than I ever dreamed of. I tell you there are jails, not so far from here either, where men are kept like beasts under-

ground, and if they come out and make war on the world, it 's only natural; and it 's the fault of the civilization that put them there. Religion tells me to do certain things, but I try to do 'em anyway, so 's I can hold my head up with the next man. The Church, I make it, is more interested in itself than in me, and in what it 's likely to get than in what I 'm not likely to get."

He paused for breath, then plunged on in more strident accents. "I 'm saying all these things because they 're facts and it 's facts that make the conditions that Sohmer's been talking about. The employer and the employee are scrapping to see which can get the biggest share of the same dollar, and the devil take the hindermost. Is that civilization? A man is born rich and spends his days like a swine and no one says a word. Is that civilization? I tell you"—Miller was almost shouting now and his eyes were hot with resentment—"that what we call civilization is just one long-pitched battle, and the fight don't exactly quit at six o'clock either. We 're using ourselves up to no purpose and we 're bringing children into the world to do the same thing over again. You talk about progress, but progress is something that 's got now so it feeds on men and sucks 'em dry and throws 'em away and reaches out for more. We 're told to keep our eyes on the

glorious future, but we're never told anything about looking behind to see the worn-out bodies that are bobbing about in our wake. Look here, Sohmer; you tell me what civilization and religion have in store for me when I'm too old or too sick to work, and I'll tell you just how important a part they are of my life."

Sohmer did not reply. He was staring at Miller as though the latter were at a great distance. It seemed to Kenneth that Sohmer had perceived behind Miller millions of others who thought and felt like this. The silence lengthened, until Kenneth stammered something about "opportunity and men being born equal." The thing sounded artificial even while he said it. Miller took him up in a flash.

"People get mixed between equity and equality, but there's as little of one as of the other. Get back to the law for a minute. It's supposed to be the same for all, is n't it?"

Kenneth nodded.

"But it is n't, and it don't look as if it ever will be. If I'm the son of a rich man and go wrong, the thing is hushed up on account of the family, but if my father is a carpenter there's mighty little hushing. And what's more, in the first case my temptations are pretty well all removed by conditions—I don't mind sticking to conditions

—while in the other they're simply thick all around me. There 's another thing; if I 'm rich I can hire enough help to influence legislation, but if I 'm poor I 've got to round up a lot more like myself till our votes are enough to count for something. That 's what they call ward politics, and it don't amount to much at that, but it 's the only weapon I 've got, because religion don't get home to me and the law won't spend enough time over me to make any allowance for the influences under which I live. We may be born poor, but I tell you we 're not born blind."

He paused, then, as though anxious to conclude more moderately, went on in a steadier voice, his forehead wrinkled with thought.

"Don't think for a minute that I can't see the difference between myself and the man who has both money and education. I suppose I ought to envy him, but I don't. The thing that strikes me about education is that it 's mighty apt to make the scholar pull away from facts—nasty, rough, uncomfortable facts like the labor question. I guess most of us feel the same. And for another thing, don't get the idea that it 's only because the other fellow has more than we have that labor is restless. Did you ever reckon that while capital has shown its power and got a certain reputation for it, labor—I mean the whole bunch of us acting

as one—has never shown its power. When trouble comes, and it surely is coming, it will be just as much on account of rivalry as anything else.” He pondered and concluded swiftly, “We’ve got something that ’s never been half used.”

“Why?” hazarded Kenneth. He had been amazed at the vivid unfolding of Miller’s mind. Gentle, quiet, and thoughtful, the master mechanic had always seemed, and this blaze of revolt was the more astonishing. If in his delicate body was prisoned such a flame, what conflagrations might not the others harbor in their stormy breasts!

Miller smiled wearily. He seemed to have spent himself. “Ask Sohmer—he always knows why we don’t do things.”

“Because labor is too large, too many-colored to understand itself—also, what to one might be a benefit to another might not be a help,” said the big man slowly. “This is the age of force. Miller, here, by his touch controls that which could grind him in pieces. The machine more strong than Miller is, but he is master. Why—because the machine is without perception. Labor has been like that machine and controlled by the cold finger of capital. But now there has come the beginning of perception, and the finger is not always master. But I would tell you that the finger

is still necessary—it will always be necessary—in its place. Intelligence! We wait for a wider intelligence.”

“You mean that so far it has been mostly on the other side.”

“Yes, it is so, and to the worker the highest imagination in the factory is exhibited, and in the factory only. Miracles are there in iron and steel. The worker is paid so much to feed a monster, a priceless monster. He pulls this and pushes that, and the monster does all else. Its own product it even counts, till by and by it is all a dream in which he sees this monster doing certain things. Not any more does it mean anything to him, and in the world there are just two things left, the monster and himself. What”—here Sohmer stared hard into Kenneth’s face, “what then is the brain of the worker like after years of this? It is on guard lest he be caught asleep and be destroyed.”

The lamp flickered. In its dwindling light his great figure assumed an outline suggestive and mysterious. He leaned slightly forward, the broad shoulders bowed, as though on them rested the weight of a weary world. His eyes were soft and wistful, his face supremely spiritual, while on the noble brow and strong lips there dwelt a firmness and wisdom that marked him as more than

any mere mystic. His poise, his unquestioning assurance, his superb patience, whose gentleness lacked nothing of power, his unnameable and prophetic atmosphere, the delicacy of his hair and skin, the curious relationship, intimate yet lofty, that he preserved with his family—all these marked him as a man apart, one chosen by destiny to work her appointed end. Beside him, Miller was a midget with bulging head, and large, bright, critical eyes. He appeared ill suited for work, so slight and unmuscular was his body, so feminine his exterior. But in Miller throbbed a quality of tenseness and alert response. His exercises and pastimes were mental. He knew he was frail, and the candle in him burned the clearer for the knowledge. To Kenneth, he seemed an abstract intelligence, housed for the time in a poorly devised case-ment.

“And how does all this seem to my friend John Anderson?” said Sohmer with a glance full of meaning.

Kenneth drew a long breath. It was inevitable that Sohmer should put the question thus. He had been waiting for it. And while he waited, there stirred in his soul the conviction that he had undergone an amazing change. It seemed now a far cry back to Hickson—but Hickson had been in truth a voice crying in the wilderness,

preparing the way for one greater than himself. Ignorant of the man who called himself John Anderson, both Sohmer and Miller had trusted—still trusted him. They had taken down the bars. Greta, too, had bared her very soul. Was it only because he had shared their labor and rest that these people accepted him, or was it all part of a strange and preconceived plan whereby some high intelligence worked its will? His mind went back to his engagement. What would Sohmer and Miller say to that? Then, gazing into Sohmer's eyes, his imagination once more went adrift. Who was Sohmer? A Dane—a workman—a leader! Yes, but what else? Miller, too, had relapsed into a silent stare, and looked at the giant with that peculiar expression, wondering yet confident, which characterized the faces of so many men in this appealing presence. Kenneth started, and recalled himself.

“You ask me how I feel about it all,” he began unsteadily, “but it is hard to tell you. When I came here first I did not understand—anything. Now I ’ve made a beginning—not more than that. You ’ve both paid to find out—as Miller says—and I ’ve paid nothing. As to the future”—here the lad faltered a little—“perhaps you know what I would like to do. It will best show what ’s in my mind now. I begin to see where most people have

gone wrong in trying to help. They commenced from the outside. They had n't worked, so they could n't really feel."

Miller nodded approvingly. "That 's it—but all the same you speak as though you were going to be free to get at this. Are you?" The mechanic shot an inquisitive glance.

"I—I don't know. I hope so."

"Well, so long as you don't forget what it 's like to wear overalls, I guess you 'll do. Good night, Sohmer—reckon we meet in Pethick's office to-morrow." He extended Kenneth a friendly hand and disappeared.

Sohmer's eyes followed him. "In Miller," he said thoughtfully, "you see one who has worked since he was a very small boy, and in a machine shop always. His mind is great, but no opportunity was given to him for education and that he sees very clearly. He is angry because it is now too late. He fights, yes, continually with himself, and not often does he speak as to-night."

"The Church," Kenneth said with a touch of awkwardness. "You don't go to church. Do you feel about it as Miller does?"

Sohmer breathed sharply and a baffling expression flickered across his face. "Is it the Church or religion of which you speak?" he said presently. "If it is of religion—it is here—always"—he

touched his breast—"but in the Church there is, to-day, so much that is not religion. Her eyes upon herself have turned in, and not out toward the world. On her own ground the Church is strong—but it is a ground that to dispute men have no time. There was once when a multitude by the Church—that is by Christ—were fed; to-day is it not the multitude that feeds the Church? When riches come to the Church her power is made cold, but when—" He broke off suddenly, his chest heaving.

The noon whistle had blown next day when Bennett, who had already spent a difficult morning, brought the deputation to Pethick's office. There were three chairs opposite the desk. The manager motioned the visitors into them and looked keenly at the group, his eyes lingering on Kenneth.

"What is it?" He addressed Sohmer.

"We would about wages speak and other things," said the big man evenly.

"Go ahead."

"And when we speak it is for hundreds of men."

"Well, take all the time you want."

"Of the wages first. There is no satisfaction in the factory; it costs too much to keep alive. We

have had many talks about this, and it is well that we speak to you before it is too late."

"Too late for what? The factory is not making a decent profit."

Sohmer sent him an inscrutable glance. "One does not additions build to a factory that loses money. We are not blind."

"I 'm not so sure of that. Now out with it and you 'll get your answer."

"In the last three years the production of the factory forty per cent. was increased."

"Who told you that?"

"Again we are not blind," said Sohmer gently. "But in the last five years it costs forty per cent. more to keep alive, and wages have gone up five per cent. How is one to keep alive?" he persisted.

"That 's right," broke in Miller thickly; "you tell us that."

Pethick laughed. "What about the other side of it?"

Sohmer shook his head slowly. "For hundreds of men there no other side is, at all."

"Is n't there? Well, I 'll tell you. Did you ever hear of competition?"

"Hell! Yes," said Miller, "it 's an excuse for cutting wages."

Pethick reddened. "Is it? You wait a minute.

There 's twice the competition there was ten years ago."

"Then you 've got a good thing; that 's all that means."

"It means," snapped Pethick angrily, "that the only thing that keeps us in the market is the price of our product. The big end of that is wages. Raise the wages and you send up the price till the product is unsaleable. There's a certain point beyond which wages can't go and we 've reached it. That 's all."

"I 've heard all this before," countered Miller doggedly. "Now you answer me. The plant of this company is worth half a million. Where did that come from?"

"Where?" Pethick's voice was ironical.

"Out of the sweat of every man who 's worked here for the last thirty years." Miller's tones lifted into a challenge. He laughed vindictively and turned to Sohmer. "You go on."

"I have spoken, I wait."

Pethick stared hard at the big man, having apparently put Miller out of his mind for the time being. Here was the one to talk to. "Look, Sohmer, I would like to help you out, but I can't do it now. Business is none too good."

"So. And that is why the machinery runs faster than last week, to make more business?"

The shaft struck home and Pethick felt it rankle. Before he could answer, Sohmer, leaning forward, began to speak earnestly. In his tone was no anger, but a revolt, vibrant with intense conviction.

"As a workman I have come and as a workman I talk. It may be that after to-day I shall not say much more, but while there is yet time, it is well to listen. To fair profits the men do not object, but it is also true that a certain part of what all men make is theirs. It is for that part that we ask. There is not now any chance to save money and old age comes very swiftly."

"Ten years ago," burst in Miller, "my wife could buy beef for fifteen cents a pound, now it costs twenty-five. Say, we want you to make up the difference, and, by God, we've earned it."

"I guess it's a case of do without," said Pethick grimly.

"Can't some one else take a spell of doing without? An automobile or two less, twenty per cent. on your money instead of thirty, a little less champagne; ever think of that?" He choked with resentment.

"Must it be always those who the least have who must go without?" added Sohmer.

"What do you want?" Pethick's voice had a touch of finality.

There was a moment's silence. Kenneth held his breath. He had been voiceless, but conscious of a violent hammering in his breast. The drama of life was unfolding.

"We want, as an increase in wages, eight per cent. And also that the machinery be in speed reduced to what it was before."

Pethick calculated swiftly, and his lips tightened. It meant twenty thousand dollars. That was just an eighth of last year's profits and there was something in the idea of parting with an eighth of the profits that struck him as being ludicrous. But, he reflected, a slight increase would be cheaper than an interruption in the work and in the next month or so he could get rid of the malcontents.

"I 'll give you two per cent."

Miller, hot with anger, began to swear. Sohmer silenced him with a gesture.

"I am sorry—"

But Pethick was looking curiously at Kenneth. "What do you say, Anderson. What do you know?"

"Do you want me to say all I know?" shot back Kenneth meaningly.

"I don't care a damn what you say."

"Then I will say it," Kenneth blazed out. "Months ago you brought me in here and asked

me to play the spy and offered me double wages for doing it. I told you"—here the lad looked at Sohmer, trembling with passion—"I told him I would n't do his dirty work, and the only reason I have said nothing about it is that he bound me to silence before he made the proposal."

Pethick's face had become colder. But Sohmer only put his arm on the lad's heaving shoulder. "So, yes, I know about that. For months I have known."

"Who told you? I did n't."

"Yourself told me in your sleep. You talked much that night, and shouted your anger. A long time I have known—and trusted," he added gently.

Miller was staring, his mouth open. His eyes roved from Kenneth to Sohmer, fixing themselves finally on Pethick. He had had about all he could stand. "What's your offer?" His voice broke, his fingers clasped and unclasped.

"Two per cent.," said Pethick coldly.

"Go to hell," grunted Miller and turned on his heel.

Sohmer tried to stop him, but too late. The outer door banged and they saw him surrounded by a group that formed magically at the factory gate. Pethick saw it, too, and his face set like stone. The big man glanced at Kenneth, his blue eyes misty. Finally he rose and gazed down at

Pethick. His working clothes seemed to invest him with a certain royal simplicity, his features were calm yet terrible. He sighed deeply and, thrusting his arm into Kenneth's, they went out without a word.

That night Kenneth sent a cablegram to Sylvia. When the seven o'clock whistle blew next morning not a wheel turned in the factory. The strike was on.

CHAPTER XV

BY the end of March, Julia Percival had become distinctly uncomfortable. It began to appear that Kenneth Landon, although possibly worthy and altruistic, had been nevertheless, short-sighted. To her matronly eyes signs were not wanting that it was somewhat reckless to stake a previous attachment against whatever other inducements Sylvia might encounter during a winter on the Riviera. For the first month or two Amaro had merely the guise of the kind of man she would have liked Sylvia to meet. He was general, representative, and, in the light of many previous winters, almost impersonal. But when Kenneth cabled that it was impossible for him to leave his work even for a month, Amaro took on a chameleon-like change, and emerged *in propria persona*, fascinating, unattached, and consequently dangerous. It lay heavy on her mind that the time had arrived to have the thing out.

Though she often reached the point of resolution, this was not so easy. Regarding the girl with observant eyes, it seemed that in the last few months she also had changed. Association

with her aunt had, to a certain extent, armed Sylvia against the arguments which Julia proposed to use. She gave evidence, too, of a certain maturity which removed her from the somewhat timid girl whom her uncle had met in Paris. Twenty-three years in Brunton had only retarded a swift blossoming that took place when the bonds of her former existence were slackened. She had acquired an assurance, a consciousness that she was a part of life at large, fortified by the reflection that to her all things were possible. And Julia Percival, recognizing this, relished her duty less than ever, then with a courage that was almost pathetic went at it valiantly during the peculiarly feminine hour that intervenes between afternoon tea and dinner.

"Sylvia," she began, "I 'm rather uncomfortable about Kenneth. Have you heard from him lately?"

The girl looked at her quizzically. She had learned to love Julia. "Yes, this week."

"You did n't tell me."

"Well, really there 's not much to tell. He 's well and the work is rather trying and he looks forward to June, and he 's sorry he could not come for Christmas—he says that every time—and that 's about all."

"And he 's never actually told you what his work is?"

“No, but I think I know. He ’s in some kind of a factory getting practical experience which he says is going to be of great use afterwards, and” —she stopped, her eyes rounding with sudden animation—“would n’t it be a joke if he were in the rubber factory; it ’s just the kind of thing he might do. You know I never thought of that.”

“Nonsense,” interrupted Julia; “he’s not such a fool. When are you to be married?”

“In July or August, or—I really can’t tell.”

“I thought you had arranged that for your return.” There was a note of surprise in the older woman’s voice.

“Really, Aunt, one would almost believe you thought I was n’t in love with Kenneth any more.”

“Well, are you?” exploded Julia with a burst of relief that the ball was rolling.

“Of—of course I am.”

“Well, my dear, all I can say is that you don’t look it.”

“I suppose,” hazarded Sylvia, “that is because I ’m used to it, and one does n’t get excited about the things one ’s used to.”

Julia Percival scanned her for a moment without speaking. The sun’s rays streamed through the open window in broad bars of light, and striking the girl’s soft brown hair touched it into vivid bronze. Against this her skin seemed pale, with a

quality of transparency. Her head was small and delicate and carried proudly. The chin, nose, and mouth were also small and molded with a touch of piquancy; the eyes, in contrast with her hair, dark and very large. They were now flecked with little points of changing light, that made them restless. It struck Julia that she looked patrician.

"All I can say is that you have got pretty well used to it," she continued dryly.

Sylvia reached over and captured her aunt's hand. "Meaning just what?"

"I don't know," protested Julia, helpless, "but you 're not a bit devoted."

"To Philippe Amaro?" flashed the girl daringly.

Her aunt grew pink and straightened her slim shoulders, inwardly thankful that the dreaded name was out at last.

"You know," went on Sylvia, "I 've been studying Amaro quite closely of late, and there is a good deal that Kenneth might learn from him. I 'm not comparing them, but I 'm afraid that Kenneth is going to be terribly—oh yes, it 's perfectly splendid of him—terribly in earnest all the time. Now, thanks to you, I have had my eyes opened and don't you think it would be rather wearisome? For instance, I know he wants us to live in Brunton."

Mrs. Percival recoiled, but the little flecks in Sylvia's eyes were dancing more rapidly than ever.

"I 've learned such a lot this winter, Aunt, about all sorts of things and about me, and,"—here her voice was a little plaintive—"I want to find out more about me before I devote myself to him. Does that sound very unreasonable? I know what you feel about the factory, that it's a call; but I don't believe you 'd feel it so strongly if you lived in Brunton. You picture me a sort of lady bountiful with a basket and entering like sunshine into the homes of the poor, and"—suddenly her lips began to tremble—"it's so lovely here. I don't want to go back. I 'm—I 'm afraid he won't understand."

Instantly the Spartan in Julia Percival demanded expression. If she yielded her front line now there were no fortifications to fall back on. "My dear," she said evenly, "when your father set his hand to the plow he never—"

"I don't want to plow," broke in Sylvia rebelliously. "I want to pick a few daisies. And besides, don't you see, it would be much better for Kenneth if I had a little more experience. I 'm only half educated."

"Experience of what? Philippe Amaro?"

The girl's brows straightened. "I don't think you 're quite fair."

“To Amaro?”

“Yes. He has been nicer and kinder than you can imagine.”

“Oh! I can imagine it,” remarked Julia Percival acidly.

Sylvia flushed. “Do you want me to defend him, Aunt? I ’m quite ready.”

“I ’m afraid you are.”

“Then I will. From the very day I met him he has been all that even you could ask. He has amused and interested and helped, and I did n’t realize how little I knew when I met him. He has never tried to make love to me—I know that’s what you imagine, and if I can only remember half of what he said it will be the best thing possible. If you think, Aunt, that I’ve got ideas from Amaro, you’re perfectly right. I have, heaps of them. And one of them is that Kenneth owes me something—the obligation is not all on my side. You know we’re going to be very well off, I can’t help that and I’m glad of it, so there are a lot of things open to us that would n’t be otherwise, and Kenneth should recognize it. I’ve got a great deal to learn that I can only get from people who are—who are cosmopolitan, and”—here she laughed a little—“the appetite comes with eating. I want to contribute everything I can to our married life, but unless I have the chance to develop

something that I'll never develop in Brunton I can't contribute what I want to and—and—" She looked at her aunt with sudden appeal, then burst out imploringly, "Can't you see—I'm not ready to be married."

Mrs. Percival, controlling an impulse, got up with painful decision. "I'm afraid you're not."

That night she kept her husband awake for an hour, and it was a further shock to find him unsympathetic. "But what am I to do?" she expostulated.

He turned on his side with revolting callousness. "Nothing. Look here, Julia, the girl makes an impulsive promise to a young man with prospects. The prospects vanish and the young man, left with an invalid father, chooses to embark on some mysterious undertaking. The girl by her father's wish, not ours mind you, comes to us for a winter. She meets an extremely interesting man and, not unnaturally, she is interested. She's not staying with us when it happens, we're staying with her—boot on the other foot. Her young man too damned busy to come over and see her. She is vexed and finds other man more interesting than ever, then goes home and marries and it is all over. Don't forget, my dear, this is the best winter we've ever had in Mentone."

"I 'm not forgetting," his wife sat up jerkily, "and she does n't want to go home, that 's the worst of it."

"Then perhaps she 'll take a house in Paris for the season," mumbled Percival drowsily. "The gods are good, very good." The reflection made him smile in the dark.

"I think I 'll see the Contesse to-morrow," said Julia thoughtfully.

"Eh! About what?"

"Everything. Now please let me go to sleep."

He chuckled. The gods had indeed been very good. As to Amaro, he felt no anxiety, and for the past winter with its unaccustomed luxury, he was devoutly thankful. Should Sylvia be swallowed up in the gloom of Brunton it would never be repeated, but should she care for Amaro enough to— He stretched luxuriously and began dreaming of hitherto unimagined possibilities.

The morning found his wife full of resolutions. Until twelve o'clock she disposed of affairs with prim decision, then, clad in austerity and an unusually stiff linen dress, she crackled toward the diminutive villa of the Contesse. The old lady saw her coming and waved a cheerful hand from her window.

"How charming, how delightful! My dear Madame, how fresh you look this superb day."

The visitor felt anything but fresh. She had spent most of the night forecasting her arguments, and it was disconcerting to find the Contesse so buoyant.

"I did want to have a chat with you before we left. You know there's not much time now."

"How sad. Menton is always at its best in April. You depart on the twentieth, is it not?"

"Yes, for Paris. My niece will be there till June and then she leaves for Canada. We shall miss her terribly."

"And how much difference to us! It is now so many years that I have welcomed you to Mentone."

"Thank you, dear Contesse." Julia was genuinely touched. She had somehow thought of the old lady as brilliant, but a little indifferent. "My niece is to be married when she reaches Canada," she added after a pause. Watching the Contesse, she noticed that her eyes wandered to Philippe's portrait on the mantel.

"I am very glad of that." A faint color bloomed in the faded cheeks. "Yes, very glad."

Julia breathed a shade quicker. "Really. Why?"

But the Contesse had begun to laugh. "How foolish an old woman can be. It is nothing."

Julia's pulse beat still faster. Was it possi-

ble that— She leaned benignantly forward.
“Please tell me.”

“Oh, no, it is too grotesque, too absurd. I thought my old brain had done with such imaginings. And you would laugh at me always.”

“Never,” said her visitor firmly.

The Contesse dabbed her eyes with a fragment of lace. “Observe my ridiculous tears. Do you know that I was actually afraid that Philippe had, yes, become *épris* with one who is already affianced. Naturally I feared disappointment for him. My dear Madame, how good you are to come and relieve my foolish heart.”

For the next moment Julia had a curious sensation of being surrounded by a ring of contesses who were all thanking her for things she had never done.

“And more than that,” added the old lady, “I fear I could not give him up. As one gets older one clings the more, and Philippe—”

“Yes, I know. And I am so glad I came,” said Julia fervently with a swift easing in her soul.
“But he will marry, won’t he?”

“I do not know. Sometimes I think that Philippe is not made by the good God to be married. He demands so much in women. He is generous and amiable, yes, but if he could—how is it in English?—fabricate a woman with a little morsel of

one, a fragment of another, an eyebrow from this one, a lip from the other, he would be *bien content*. But alas! when we women enter the world it is to say 'Observe how perfect I am. Take me.' And when Philippe hears that, he shrugs his shoulders. He has often spoken of your niece, yes, but not in a certain way."

A great peace had fallen on Julia. She felt bland. It was true that she had very nearly put her foot in it, but her recovery struck her as being so adroit as not to be noticed. Looking at the Contesse with freshly appreciative eyes, she began to discern a new quality and unexpected virtues. It was strange she should have thought her indifferent.

"The bond between you and your son is very beautiful," she ventured. "You are both so happy."

The white head turned with a quick, bird-like motion. "Is Philippe happy?"

"Is n't he?" said Julia a trifle flustered.

"I do not know," answered the old lady thoughtfully.

If, during lunch, Mrs. Percival had a glow of inward triumph she concealed it. Toward Sylvia she was unusually affectionate, then took her nap with blissful tranquillity. She realized that after the girl's departure her own *ménage* would exper-

ience a little reaction. This would be due to re-occupying the lessened radius of their former existence. But, she reflected, though contracted, it was nevertheless not so arduous. She was content with what her husband could afford and administered it well. Descending from her siesta, she found Percival smoking peacefully. He, too, had had pleasurable reflections.

"A very satisfactory visit," she announced. "And somehow I got to know the Contesse much better. John, there's nothing in it," she added with a touch of finality.

"In what?"

"Between Sylvia and Philippe Amaro—it was such a relief. Looking back at the past months, I see that they were much more together than I realized. I suppose he is attractive to women and it would have been more or less natural if they had got fond of each other."

"And they didn't?" The tones were almost dejected.

"Of course not."

"Just what did the Contesse say?" enquired her husband. He had still a gleam of hope.

Julia recounted the conversation, dwelling with a certain insistence on that part of it which had eased her most. When she finished he looked somewhat comforted.

"My dear," he began, "I don't quite agree with you. There's an old Latin proverb, 'Hurry up slowly.' It suits very well. Apart from anything these two feel for each other, I wouldn't scorch my fingers. Sylvia is twenty-three and she has learned her way about and learned it remarkably quickly. Also she is very much her own mistress. Amaro is not exactly an infant in the customs of the world, and his dynasty, if you don't mind my saying so, is considerably older than ours. Also he is very much of a gentleman. You must admit that though he's had a difficult position in Mentone, every one has the highest regard for him. I've an idea that at the back of your head you suspect all dark-haired, flashing-eyed, olive-skinned men are libertines in one way or another. Now I don't know this quixotic youth, Landon, but I do know Amaro, and that in a very unusual experience of life he has picked out the things that are nice and avoided the ones that are nasty, and the result is, well, rather fine. Do you, for instance, guarantee that young Landon will make Sylvia happy and Amaro will not?"

His wife regarded him in frank amazement, but Percival merely lay back examining the tip of his cigar with undisguised interest, and added, "In other words, Julia, I think that with the best possible intentions, you may yet make a mess of it."

She rose with dignity and a feeling that never before had her husband been so disappointing. "Where is Sylvia now?"

He chuckled. "I left her at Rumpelmayer's with Amaro. They were going for a walk."

Truth lay behind the chuckle. At that moment Sylvia and Amaro, climbing the shoulder of the long and lovely ridge that lifts north toward Castellar, had stopped to rest and now looked down at Mentone, where ranks of white villas seemed to dip seaward to cool their red roofs in the Mediterranean. The ridge was timbered with ancient olive trees, whose gnarled and distorted roots writhed into the rocky soil, while overhead stretched a whispering canopy of pale, metallic green. The afternoon had marched on to that mysterious hour when the sun begins to yield insensibly, and deep in valley and ravine are born the first shadows of evening. Amaro sat, his knees drawn up, his eyes tracing the fringe of foam that skirted Cap Martin and trailed shimmering to Monte Carlo. Above him, on a bench, used by the faggot women who bring wood from the grove, Sylvia rested, a little breathless, a little self-conscious. She was exquisite, with an added color that matched the flowers in her belt.

Far below at some invisible place a man was singing, "*Partant pour La Syrie.*" His voice

floated up clear and true, mellow with distance, yet thrilling with a superb abandon.

Amaro glanced at the girl. "*That I may prove the bravest brave, and love the fairest fair.* Happy devil, is n't he?"

Sylvia had been gazing at the horizon, picturing it torn with the oars of long-vanished galleys. This sea gave her strange feelings of transitoriness and beauty, of the immortal permanence of the earth and the utter poignancy of all that was most fair. It seemed, too, that Amaro did well in this setting. Life, sun, and wind appeared almost to have some special thing for him to which he responded with careless but perfect understanding. She had a fleeting wonder at what it would be like to touch such a man into supreme emotion. The thought rather frightened yet in a curious way attracted her. In another month she would be in Paris and on her journey home. That was tangible, reasonable, and prophetic, but it puzzled her that she could anticipate it so soberly. Just then Amaro's voice had broken in.

Something in his tone drew her eyes to him and she smiled uncertainly. "Why?"

"Because he is loved, like yourself." There followed a little silence while he stared at Cap Martin. "I hope Mademoiselle will not entirely forget Mentone."

"That would be impossible. I am carrying away too many new ideas."

"Yes. Of what?"

She laughed. "Of myself among other things."

"In that case you should go away very happy."

"Do you remember telling me that I was only half educated?"

"Did I? What insolence."

"No. You were perfectly right. And now"—she paused, then went on very distinctly—"I want to finish my education."

"At home?" Amaro was aghast. "But one cannot do that at home."

"No," she said slowly, "not at home."

"But I understood that you were to be married this summer, and marriage is not always an education; it is sometimes only an introduction."

Sylvia glanced at him with heightened color. "An introduction to what?"

"That very much depends on whom one marries," he said quizzically. "One sees great mistakes."

She nodded. "I am afraid Brunton is going to be rather difficult after the Continent." Her eyes wandered to the exquisite scene below. "Nothing could be more different from this."

"Brunton, what a name! It sounds so—so practical."

"It is, very." She smiled mirthlessly. "And if I take color from Brunton I shall become rather stern, and probably very worthy."

"But Mademoiselle must not become stern. Do not live in that place; live where there is motion and life." His tone became suddenly serious. "Is there any reason why you should not live where you choose?"

"Yes," she parried, "I am afraid so. Its name is Kenneth Landon."

"And is Monsieur Landon then so implacable?"

"I don't quite know; I'm really going to find out. You see, I don't actually know him as well as I thought. I almost know you better." She stopped in confusion.

Amaro did not answer, but a sudden pallor seemed to spread beneath his olive skin. His hands, clenched around his knees, tightened till the veins stood out like thin, blue cords. A little frightened, she looked away. Presently he began to speak evenly, coolly, without a hint of tenseness.

"Mademoiselle, you have a great deal to give, but that is not unusual. All women have much to give; it is themselves, and beside that a fortune is not to be considered. You yourself have promised and"—he hesitated a little—"it is settled. But it is well to consider what will be given in exchange, and there is only one thing that counts and

that is companionship. And to be a companion one must be piquant and refreshing to the soul."

She turned to him slowly, as though fascinated. Would Kenneth be piquant and refreshing to her soul? Amaro unconsciously gave her the epitome of queries that had been moving disturbingly for months.

"Suppose," she said uncertainly, "that you knew a girl who was engaged to some one who perhaps would not be that to her, but it would break the man's heart if she did not marry him, and the girl herself had become conscious of many things she did not dream of before, which made it all the harder to keep her word. What do you think she should do in a case like that?"

"That depends upon whose heart it is least harmful to break. But"—he smiled—"the heart of youth is easily mended. I would suggest that Mademoiselle might consider this fact. It becomes more difficult,"—he hesitated—"yes much more difficult, later on, to repair a heart. You see, Mademoiselle, you yourself will always be companionable. The good God has provided it. I have noticed that in so many ways you give out something to which the world responds, because there is so much in the world to which you are '*sympatica*.' " It seemed that as he spoke a hush fell over them both and the faint murmur of the glistening town

grew fainter still. His voice came in again. "There is something else that goes with this. People like yourself unconsciously inflict pain. Yes, I mean that. And the pain is twin brother to charm and beauty, and is felt by those for whom the charm and beauty are not. *Mon Dieu!* how I moralize. Tell me, do you bring him to Menton, this Kenneth of yours?"

"Of course." She pictured Kenneth and Amaro together, but swiftly concluded that Kenneth would never understand the other. "I would n't have him miss it. And if we travel for a while, as I want to, I should like to come here before going back."

He shook his head very deliberately. "Please, no."

"Why not?" She glanced at him quickly.

"Don't you know?" he said unsteadily. "Is it possible?"

Sylvia was robbed of words. She had sometimes wondered if Amaro might not suddenly appear in a new guise, and for this she had watched occasionally with a curiosity that almost amounted to pique. But always at the moment when it appeared that he might most naturally have betrayed some susceptibility, he had been more than ever witty and impersonal. Such was the Amaro

she had known. Now the outer semblance of the man had suddenly disappeared and she saw him more intimately revealed; as polished, as considerate, as infinitely understanding as before, but warmed into a new vitality by the very simplicity of his admission.

"I did n't know that—that you cared," she whispered.

"How could you? I—I did n't know myself."

She tried to laugh, but failed completely. "I want to think of you as some one who is very experienced and—"

"That is my age," put in Amaro.

"No it is n't; and as some one who is tremendously kind and sympathetic and helped a great deal, yes more than any one else, to give me the loveliest winter I've ever had. Can't you think of me like that?" Her eyes rested on him with spontaneous affection.

"By all means." He smiled like Pan, till in his dark hair she could almost see the vine leaves cluster. "That would indeed be most kind. I look forward to the next few years and see perhaps others who will think of me like that, but when one knows what to expect, one is less venturesome. What a fool I am!" he added cynically.

"Don't," she pleaded. Her eyes were misty, for in that moment he had achieved a new place in her heart. This was the real Amaro.

"I 'm sorry," he said penitently, "but I did n't make love, did I? A little love happened for one instant to make itself. That was surely a harmless thing, to which even your admirable aunt could not object. So, Mademoiselle, think of me, yes, as one who is so devoted that to his other devotions he may be remiss." He stooped and kissed her hand.

Half an hour later they parted silently. He stood for a moment after Sylvia had disappeared and walked thoughtfully on. Passing his mother's villa, he continued into the road that, crossing the boundary at Ventmiglia, winds eastward, clinging to the flanks of the hills. Three hours later he returned, still walking briskly but with a peculiar lassitude on his smooth features.

The Contesse looked up anxiously as he entered. "My son has dined?"

"Let me see. Did I dine? No, I did not."

"But Philippe!"

"I have been too busy, far too busy?"

"And who has been in trouble to-day?"

"No one, Mater, I was only trying to keep a friend out of it."

"And you succeeded?" The Contesse had

learned that the confidences of Philippe's office were inviolable.

"Time will tell; I cannot."

She glanced at him affectionately. "And my son will not even be thanked. It is often so."

"This time I shall not be thanked. At least I hope not."

She nodded, then, with a swift scrutiny of his impassive face, "Madame Percival came to pay a little visit this morning. It was very interesting."

Philippe's eyes grew a shade darker. "Yes."

"She was, so to speak, agitated, but went away however quite happy. She came to inquire whether you were fond of a certain Mademoiselle, and told me incidentally, but without meaning to tell me, that this Mademoiselle was, yes, much interested in you."

Amaro sat up very straight. "She told you that?"

"Yes," said the Contesse calmly, "but she went away quite happy."

"What did you say to her?" A dull flush had replaced the pallor in his cheeks.

"Very little. We talked about your boyhood and many things foreign to the subject, but the dear lady did not know. For one who has lived so long she is, well, amazing."

"And my mother said nothing else?"

"I would not discuss that which my son has spoken of so little with me," she answered a little stiffly.

At that Amaro crossed the room and knelt beside her. "*Cara*," he said gently, "there was nothing to discuss. To-day, on the road to Castellar, Mademoiselle Sylvia and I discovered that we were very good friends—but that is all. And I am more than ever convinced that so long as I am honored by the presence of a very dear lady who does not look sixty-five, nothing else is necessary."

"Is my son quite sure?" The voice of the Contesse trembled ever so slightly.

He laughed. "So sure that—"

Just then a servant brought in a note. Philippe looked at his mother. She nodded. "Of course."

He read it, his brows straightening into a black line, and jerked out his watch. Standing for an instant his eyes fixed themselves imperatively on the Contesse, till with an exclamation, he dashed out.

His mother felt a fluttering at her heart. The note lay on the floor at her feet, and with a curious shrinking she picked it up.

Dear Monsieur Amaro:

I have just had an urgent cable calling me home and leave by to-night's train for Paris. There is only just time to say

how very greatly I appreciate all your kindness and to thank you very, very much for all you have done for your friend
SYLVIA.

Five minutes later, Amaro, in the rear seat of a large car, was dashing along the road to Roquebrune. He was hatless, his eyes very bright, his watch still held open. Glancing at it frequently, he leaned forward and urged the driver to greater speed, till, swaying through the village, the car turned to the left and headed into Monte Carlo. A moment or two afterwards he sped into the station.

The Paris express was just getting into motion. Standing away from the carriages, he scanned them swiftly and plunged forward. Sylvia and her uncle felt the window of their compartment darkened and looked up. Simultaneously a bundle of violets hurtled in and tumbled softly between them.

"God bless my soul!" ejaculated Percival, "that 's Amaro."

But Sylvia, after one glimpse of the man whose burning eyes dropped so rapidly out of sight, only captured the violets and held them close to hide the sudden storminess of her breast.

The train was halfway to Nice before Percival had formulated his comment. The girl still sat with her face obscured, but her eyes rested un-

seeingly on the reeling landscape and in them moved a light that baffled her uncle's keenest conjecture. Did she love Amaro, had the Riviera swamped Brunton and the experimental if altruistic Kenneth, was Julia wrong and were the glimmerings of his own fancy to be realized? With this and much more flashing through his mind, he coughed diffidently and spoke.

"If I may say so, my dear, that was rather an extraordinary thing for Amaro to do." He reflected and added, "At least it would have been for a man less impulsive."

"Was that impulse, Uncle? I think it was rather nice of him."

"Possibly—but considering where you are going and why—" he broke off pointedly.

"I am afraid there won't be many violets thrown at me in Brunton. My future husband will probably think it—well—unpractical." She surveyed him gravely.

Percival caught a throb of rebellion. "I don't know anything about Kenneth except what you have told me, and that"—he smiled quizzically—"is n't much. As to Amaro, I suppose under the circumstances there 's no use discussing him."

In spite of himself there was an invitational note in his voice. He must first of all be uncle, and for the time, guardian, but he failed to see why

he should not be human as well. Julia was fifteen miles away and getting farther every instant. It seemed that of late he had seldom been fifteen yards from Julia, and now he inwardly confessed to a shameful sense of deliverance. This in turn awakened in him a curious sympathy for the girl whose cheek was still pressed against her fragrant gift.

"However," he began again, "I find Amaro distinctly interesting, both as to type and personality. He 's very strong on form and that 's a good thing. He 's generous to a fault and he 's in love, so far as I can make out, with some kind of composite woman who never existed, though plenty of women have, I believe, been ready to marry him. If he ever does marry, he will put his wife on a pedestal and worship her and expect the rest of the world to do the same."

Sylvia laughed. "Then he 's a perfectionist."

"Exactly, and quite honest about it. If money had attracted him, he could have had it long ago."

"How old is he, this paragon of yours?"

"They 're your violets," chuckled Percival, "not mine. He 's about forty, but I 've an idea that age is n't measured by years on the Continent." He nodded over this, wishing almost that Julia could have heard it, but concluded that it

was as well she had n't, after which he gazed at Sylvia with kindly eyes. Memories were flooding back on him of days when the blood was young and the air had a certain divine taste that somehow the palate now missed. He leaned forward. "My dear, are you in love with Amaro?"

Sylvia started. "No!" she said quickly.

"Then you are in love with Kenneth?" he persisted.

"I don't know—yes, I suppose so. Anyway I'm going to marry him." Her voice trembled between tears and mirth, her face was lovely and mutinous. "You see," she hazarded, "we've promised each other."

And whatever visions might have been darting through Percival's head, this brought him up short. The thing was settled and he knew it, just as so many uncomfortable things seem the most settled. Chambers had written him about it before Sylvia's arrival, and between the lines of his letter he could clearly see that Sylvia's guardian expected her to be returned with the right side of her affections uppermost, and free from any sentimental entanglements. To this Percival had promptly replied that once in the bosom of his family the girl would be preserved from even the suggestion of a continental alliance, and that so far as he was concerned a new suitor would only

approach his charge over his dead body. Now, here he sat, building Amaro into a demigod for his own selfish ends. There came an instant of vivid wonder whether Julia, prim, orthodox, and ruthlessly conscientious, was not after all a heaven-sent and guiding star.

"It sounds queer, I know," continued Sylvia, "but really I know Monsieur Amaro better than I do Kenneth. We were engaged so soon and I left so soon after our engagement that Kenneth and I saw very little of each other. He was working too hard. Please don't think I'm comparing them, because"—her tones faltered a little—"there's no comparison, but I owe Monsieur Amaro a great deal. He's opened my mind to many things and just what it meant to be—well—very rich. There are so many ways of spending money ignorantly that I did n't realize before why some rich people attain position and that sort of thing and others never do. Then there's the waste of oneself which he thinks worse still. Please,"—she put her hand impulsively on his arm—"please don't imagine he made love—he did n't. When he heard I was engaged he—he was like a brother. I want you to be glad I have met him and"—she added softly—"I want Kenneth to be glad, too."

"Kenneth is a very fortunate young man, my

dear. D'you suppose he realizes just how much has been done for him?"

Sylvia laughed. "I don't know, but I 'm going to find out." She dropped into a reverie from which presently shot a question. "Do you think it 's my duty, Uncle, to settle down and live in Brunton?"

"Bless my soul, no! Why should you?"

The girl smiled contentedly. In later months the factory had taken on a new aspect. It gave her a peculiar sense of property, and about it hung a strange atmosphere of force. It was a dynamo that revolved at her bidding, something she could depend upon. She had liked, since it was four thousand miles away, to think of its size, its potency, its grim certainty, and she developed new ideas of the father who had called this prodigious thing into being. She had not yet regarded it as a mint, but should its steady speed slacken she would be filled with alarm. It had, too, in a way, justified itself, for because of such factories there was possible the beauty, ease, and grace of the favored places she had visited. Pethick, cold with system and efficiency; Chambers, shrewd, bland and far-sighted; she thought of them with gratitude and a new glow of security. As to Amaro, she admitted not only affection but also indebtedness. Because of him she could take her

own stand with Kenneth, to whom she was entirely loyal. Kenneth aroused in her a pleasurable excitement, but not passion. She now saw him in the effect he produced on herself, and the fact that he awakened no sense of abandonment suggested curiously that their engagement must be recommenced and relived.

For this she felt supremely well equipped. The essential woman in her had emerged from the chrysalis and the last few months completed her armament. It gave her a thrill to reflect that at last she knew what she was entitled to anticipate. This discovery would have been impossible in Brunton. It was for her to develop in Kenneth the charm she found in Amaro, to enlarge him as became the man of property, but first of all to remove him from all that was grim and forbidding. The recurrent sense of her own power of appeal stimulated her to the effort.

John Percival kissed her with unwonted affection when they said good-by at Havre. He was touched by her steadfastness, even though it chimed so awkwardly with his own roseate dreams. When the steamer's whistle blared above them, it seemed that in a way there was something sacrificial about the girl.

"We 'll be back sooner than you think." She smiled at him mistily. "And for a thousand kind-

nesses from Aunt Julia and yourself, I don't know how to thank you."

"It's nothing," he said, suddenly depressed. "But if you want to do something for us all, just be happy. I think the Lord made you for that. Don't let impulse"—he hesitated over the word—"commit you to anything you may regret. You'll have great responsibilities. Just tell the Chambers we want you back, double or single, it doesn't matter which." And with that he tramped down the gangway very red in the face, and stared up at the slim, straight figure leaning over the rail till the great bulk of the vessel dwindled into indistinction. He never knew that while her handkerchief fluttered bravely, there was racing through Sylvia's brain the memory of moonlight on the Corniche Road and the echo of Amaro's voice as he, too, told her that destiny meant her to be happy.

CHAPTER XVI

THE strike was on, but the Sohmer household rose at its usual hour and breakfast was over by a quarter to seven. Kenneth could see no difference, save that the Sohmers were unnaturally silent, and several times he intercepted glances that passed between the little woman and her husband. She seemed to study and appraise him, with steady eyes in which moved a speechless confidence. The big man's expression evidenced an equal trust, as though these two having already gone through deep water now contemplated calmly that which had become inevitable. Kenneth caught Greta, too, looking at him. It impressed him with the consciousness that he had yet to be tried in a furnace to which she herself was not a stranger. He felt at the same time that there radiated from her waves of communication which invited him to test, to draw from her whatever solace he might need. "This is the hour," she almost said, "in which you will see what I can do."

At a quarter to seven something urged Kenneth to leave the house, but instead he joined Sohmer

and together they went into the parlor and sat quite formally on two of the best chairs. It was as though they had come too early for a funeral. Presently Greta appeared and leaned against the door frame, her hands hanging loosely, her figure slight and graceful, her blue eyes cloudy. She too was waiting, her bosom moving in a rhythmic tide with long and steady breathing. The wooden clock on the mantel ticked loudly, and, with a strident whirr, struck seven. At the same moment the roar of the factory whistle quivered through the house.

Involuntarily Kenneth glanced at Sohmer. The big man's eyes were grave and his great head moved slowly. What they had heard was Pethick's notice that the factory was there for them to work in, and if they stayed away it was their own affair. This message drifted through quite mysteriously but quite clearly, and the Sohmer household received it without a word. It was an ultimatum from capital to labor.

At the same time they seemed to be in voiceless touch with hundreds of other such rooms as this. The mind wandered to them automatically, finding just such calm, just such breathlessness, and toward Sohmer, motionless in his chair, there stretched myriads of invisible filaments of trust and grim resolution. Suddenly Greta came swiftly

across, stooped over her father, and pressed his head to her breast. Then she ran upstairs.

At nine o'clock Miller reported. He had been to the factory and learned that the men were practically all out. The boiler house crews were, however, on duty, with the exception of Erickson, but this was as Sohmer had advised, for without steam the danger from fire would be redoubled. The office staff were in their places, but the factory itself was devoid of workers. The day dragged on. Men dropped in haphazardly. They were going that way and just wanted to say that they would see the thing through. There was a curious assumption of indifference that reached at times almost a false hilarity, and this was mutually recognized as the proper manner. But there were also poignant moments when the curtain shifted and revealed an inward palpitation that uncovered the tenseness of the hour.

By ten o'clock the women's work was finished. Kenneth, sitting in his room, heard the front door close, then, at his own door, a knock. Greta stood there, her eyes very bright. "Let us go into the country. I have our lunch got ready and I want to walk, walk, and to-day is a holiday. Father and mother have gone out together; they have much to talk over." She looked very well and unusually animated. Her dress, close fitting, re-

vealed a figure which had grown slimmer, more lissom. There was color in her cheeks; she suggested energy and endurance.

He nodded cheerfully, and they started toward the electric car, Kenneth swinging the basket, in one corner of which rattled a small tin kettle. Passing near the post-office there came the thought that perhaps by now Sylvia's answer had arrived. He excused himself and ran in. Peering through the glass door of his box, his heart jumped at the sight of the yellow envelope. This brought Sylvia very near. His hand shook as he ripped open the cablegram.

Do not understand necessity, but am returning first steamer.
SYLVIA.

This was all. He had finished his own message with love, and surely that should have been sufficient. But Sylvia had spoken curtly and almost with vexation, suggesting that while she agreed and agreed promptly, it was for him to make good his appeal. He felt rebellious, till this died out in the vision of Sylvia's awakening, and he pictured her revolt when she knew the truth, Pethick's discomforture, the happiness that must result. He thrust the sheet in his pocket and hurried across to where Greta waited for him. At sight of his face, her eyes clouded.

"What is it? Is there bad news?"

"No," he laughed, "good news."

"And will you not tell me? Is it good for both, you and me?"

"Yes, for all of us."

She hesitated, "But you do not look happy. There is good news and you are disappointed. Is it not so? Perhaps to-day we had better not go."

"Greta," he said soberly, "I would n't miss this walk for anything. See, the sun is coming out."

She sighed, but seemed to dismiss the shadow in her eyes. They caught an electric car which took them to the outskirts of the city, from which they set out to climb the long ridge that lifted to the northward. Far below them the lake tilted like a gigantic saucer whose rim cut the horizon in a hard, blue line. It flashed in the sun with a myriad twinkling facets, and from its surface a fresh wind drifted toward them with a chill sharpness that kept the blood tingling and quickened their steps.

Greta was rather silent, and walked easily with a settled stride that without effort matched Kenneth's pace. She was, it appeared, so content to be with him that for the moment it needed no comment. As the sun grew warmer she took off her jacket and laughingly refused to let him carry it. Her cheeks were very pink, her eyes soft. He could hear her long, deep breathing, and it seemed

to exhale something to blend with the quickening unction of springtime that now began to touch field and wood into resurgent life.

A long dormant pulse awoke in him and he felt his own blood respond. For a little while the factory and the strike had dropped behind, and blessed space was before him. He had survived a winter of hard labor and was conscious of being stronger than ever before. Glancing at the girl with a curious fascination, his eyes wandered to face, throat, and the exquisite curve of her bosom. Breathlessly he jerked away his head. A slow fire had begun to throb in his veins and he felt strangely exalted yet strangely unhappy. His fingers grew stiff and nerveless, opening and closing at intervals, while a thin singing thrilled in his ears. He tried desperately to stop thinking and to talk. Presently he found himself again staring hungrily.

She slipped her arm into his own. "It is so good to be here with you."

"Is n't it jolly?" His voice was unsteady.

"Yes, it is well to be happy, to be everything, to-day." She seemed unnaturally calm.

He pressed her arm to his side. "That 's it; everything," he said huskily.

She suddenly looked extraordinarily young, then her lips trembled, and the color died in her cheeks. She appeared to Kenneth to be moving

forward to some sacrificial future, the poignancy of which she alone could realize. "Tell me," she said quickly, "there is much that you had before that you miss now, to-day."

He paused for an answer. There was something so inexplicable about this day and this hour that for a point of time all else had ceased to exist. He was going to marry Sylvia. That part of it was settled, but there had sprung up ranks of realities between his present mood and his marriage, things that had to be done and lived and felt. It seemed, too, that the gods had pushed away for the present all else but this girl, and had cleared a passionate space in the affairs of the world into which nothing might intrude until that which was meant to be should have had its course.

"I miss nothing," he replied deliberately.

"I am so glad, so glad. You see,"—she hesitated, and continued thoughtfully, "you have always missed something before."

"How did you know?"

"Because I, too, have missed it—all my life—and it is hard. Sanders came to see me yesterday and I told him,"—here she broke off and turned away her face—"that with you I would for a week sooner be happy than with him for all my life miserable be."

"You should n't say that." Kenneth's lips

were dry and he spoke with difficulty, such was the clamor in brain and body.

"But I know so well what would happen. There would be children and not any love, and much work without any happiness, and by and by I would hate him and then I would go away altogether, for he would take all that I had to give and forget that I had any soul." She paused. "Do you want this for me?"

"Don't you think you are hard on Sanders?" he said unsteadily.

She shook her head with delicate certitude. "What he wants I feel; a girl can always feel that. If one loves one gives, but—" she continued slowly, "so many girls see it and do not care. It will come right afterwards, they say. And then it is too late, for nothing the same afterwards is."

He glanced at her strangely, and she began to speak again, her mind reaching out with quiet comprehension.

"It is curious to feel that one has oneself changed. I see now there is much that I used to do and think which I cannot any more do and think. For so many years I did not see past our own front gate, and the world was like an enemy." She paused. "Do you understand?"

"I think I do," he said slowly.

"It is not easy to make plain, but now the world is very beautiful. Sometimes I hear songs that are sung a long way off, and the books you told me of, I have read them all. 'Lorna Doone' I read twice. I was puzzled."

"But why?"

"I did not understand why John Ridd loved Lorna so much. She had not earned it, she did not do anything. Then the second time it was clear. He was so generous and asked for nothing. If she had been not beautiful and only rich I don't think it would have been the same. And the poetry, I loved that. 'The Princess' is wonderful. Ever since then I have been watching to see whether people feel like that now."

"What did you decide?" he put in with growing interest.

"That, yes, they do. It is the same but in a different shape, and I think perhaps that people now live what before they said. My father is like King Arthur and you, yes, you are like Launcelot."

Greta's eyes were bright and starry and she walked as though over the fields of Camelot. Was she to be Guinevere? It appeared that she quietly contemplated a future inexpressibly empty, but, he admitted, there was an essential part of himself that would always be Greta's.

"I have so many more friends now," she con-

tinued, "because of you. They are books, and when I open a book it is like opening the door of the mind of a friend. I shall not be lonely, and when you come back you will find that I am just the same as the people you have always known."

A medley of faces passed through his brain and in their quick procession he could catch none that surpassed Greta's in piquancy and charm, none that seemed more illumined.

"I can't tell you," he said shakily, "all you've been. You're like a lamp in the dark. We can't settle things for ourselves, they're somehow settled for us, but you deserve the best that the best man in the world can give you, and—"

"And to-day it will be like that," she broke in, "and there will not be any other place but just here where we are, and no other people but ourselves. I shall be happy remembering to-day."

Her voice was tempered yet vitalized with resolution. She had learned to prize herself too highly to waste her life on Sanders, but the pressure of her arm and innumerable touches of tenderness in glance and manner revealed a prodigal desire to spend herself on the man she loved, asking no more than destiny might vouchsafe to give. Her royal abandonment moved Kenneth mightily. He found himself drawn to it by

strands that were rooted deep in his own crescent strength. He began to tremble and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Greta," he said desperately, "Greta!"

She smiled at him with unutterable affection. Again silence fell upon them as they walked, their fingers linked, their bodies swaying in unison. By this time they were well into the country. There were occasional glimpses of the lake, but for the most part it was a succession of brown fields, broken by bush lands where evergreens clustered amid the naked maples and made dark recesses with inviting shadows lying deep. It was nearly noon when she turned into a path that led straight into the heart of the woods.

"We shall eat now, and rest." She sent him a baffling glance. Her eyes had become restless.

"You must be tired," he said awkwardly.

They struck a winding trail and followed it for a quarter mile. All sounds ceased, save the woodpeckers drumming on hollow trunks and the rustle of dead leaves beneath their feet. To Kenneth the bushlands seemed imminent and portentous. The very trees closed in behind as though to screen them from enquiring eyes. Presently Greta stopped on a little ridge where ground hemlock grew thick.

"Shall we eat here, and will you a fire make?"

The basket slipped from his grasp and he turned to her suddenly. In another moment his arms were around her. "Greta,"—his heart was hammering.

Her head nestled to his shoulder and she stood circled in his embrace. His arms tightened till he was intoxicated with warmth and nearness. A faint fragrance emanated from her. The immortal and ancient appeal enveloped her. Then Greta raised her eyes.

At first he was conscious only of their beauty, their confidence and superb abandon, till, far in their lustrous depths moved something infinitely rare and tender. It was her soul. Spirit-like and tenuous it gleamed at him out of an amazing profundity. This inner radiance he now recognized; but his own soul, his own spirit, had not heretofore perceived it. It came to him a free-will offering, the inviolate tenant of a spontaneous body. For a point of time the world seemed to slide out of existence, till, slowly, he became aware that whatever else he might accept, this inner radiance was nevertheless linked indissolubly with a greater and invisible radiance. Not heir to death and decay, it would ultimately elude its exquisite prison and carry with it the history of its earthly sojourn. Was that history to be what he himself had made it? Strangely came

the thought of Sanders. Sanders, too, wanted Greta, but he was ready to marry her.

The girl sighed at first in utter contentment, then with a dawning wonder in her eyes. Whatever reaction was at work in Kenneth, began mysteriously to communicate itself. She seemed to withdraw by imperceptible stages that detached successively every clinging tendril, even though she stood locked still in his arms. Finally there died the nearness and warmth, and he looked down at one who had grown listless and remote; and now, beautiful as ever, but pallid and estranged, regarded him with a hitherto undreamed of comprehension. It was Greta in the flesh, but a flesh endowed with new attributes; Greta with every physical allurements, but robbed, even in his embrace, of every passionate appeal.

His arms dropped to his side and simultaneously they moved apart. A silence ensued. Greta's lips began to tremble and she stared at him fixedly. Suddenly she flung herself face downward on the ground.

He stood helpless, and, with infinite remorse, knelt beside her. "Greta, dear, don't you understand?"

Her body quivered. "Yes, I do understand, though I did not want to. You do not love me—like that."

"I do love you, Greta," he said gently.

She did not answer at once. The rattle of a farmer's cart drifted faintly in from the road. Beside her the lunch basket lay half open, revealing dainty and pathetic little parcels. The air seemed to have grown colder. Presently she sat up and looked at him strangely.

"It is my fault, I know that. You told me that you were going to be married. I remember, but I tried to forget. By and by perhaps I shall not any more see you, and you do not know what that will be to me. I have not before asked you but now I ask, who is it that you marry?" Her voice died out, her face was paler than ever.

Kenneth breathed sharply and unconsciously his hand sought his pocket.

"You have it there?" she said; "a message? Give it to me, have I not a right?"

"Yes," he answered unsteadily, "every right, but—"

"I am not afraid." She took the cablegram and read it slowly.

"Who is Sylvia, and why does she return?"

"Her other name is Percival, I sent a message to her yesterday." To Kenneth his own voice seemed hollow and unnatural.

The girl's brows wrinkled. "That is strange.

Does she live here? The name is the same as—” She stopped abruptly, her eyes hardening.

“It is the same,” said Kenneth under his breath. “I cabled her when the strike was called and—Greta, why do you look like that?”

Her lips parted. She leaned forward without a vestige of color, her face suddenly small and pinched. Her breast began to heave irregularly and she seemed old, haggard, and tortured all in a moment. “It is the Miss Percival who—who owns the factory?”

Kenneth, too moved to speak, nodded.

She sat, staring at him, the cablegram slipping unnoted from her fingers. Seconds passed and a change became slowly perceptible. Reading her transparent features, Kenneth saw fear and shock gradually give way, displaced by something that was almost pity. The tumult of her bosom lulled itself softly, the tense body relaxed, the fixity of her gaze was slackened. Presently came a smile inexpressibly sad.

“And that is why you have in the factory been working?”

“No,” he protested; “she did n’t know till yesterday.”

“Why then did you come?”

“To find out for myself, I wanted to understand so that afterwards—” he paused uncertainly.

"So that you might tell her. That is it?"

"Yes."

"And then she would make things better?"

He nodded silently.

"But she did not try to find out for herself."

"That is rather hard for a woman," protested Kenneth.

"Things are hard for many women," said Greta slowly. He had no answer to that, and she went on thoughtfully. "So you will live here and you will take charge of the factory?"

"I hope so."

"And your—your wife will help to do what you want?"

"Nothing would mean so much to me as that."

"Perhaps," ventured the girl, "she has too much. I think,"—here she cast him a searching glance—"I think there are many women who are too fine and to themselves too precious to touch what is, they think, below them. It is not easy to have much money and not be precious to oneself."

"You do not know Miss Percival." Kenneth's voice was curiously unresentful.

"No," said Greta quietly, "never shall I know her."

He stared. There was something in her tone strangely suggestive of Sohmer, the same touch

of immutable placidity. "I 'm sure you will," he answered stoutly. "And very soon, too."

"She will not give you what I could give," protested Greta faintly. "She is very rich, but—" She glanced at the lunch basket and smiled pathetically.

Kenneth felt a wave of sympathy and busied himself with a fire. Watching him silently, she disappeared into the wood and returned with an armful of sticks. In a few moments she appeared to have recovered her former spirits, and opening the lunch basket spread out her parcels.

But it was a somewhat voiceless feast. There were intervals when she merely regarded him with a curious and wistful affection. Followed snatches of talk, in which he perceived a certain finality in her love. That he could not return it, made no difference to the fact that it was his. Kenneth, relieved that now she knew and knew absolutely, recognized far back in her brain a belief that at some other time he would turn to her and to her alone. He pondered over this till there crept over him a great languor, the aftermath of spiritual and bodily tension. Drowsiness took him and he could see only her gentle eyes. Later he awoke with a start, his head on her lap. He rubbed his own eyes and sprang to his feet. "How long have I been asleep?"

"Not long, it does n't matter." Her voice was full of soft inflexions.

He blushed furiously. "Did I go to sleep like that?"

"No, but you were not comfortable and I made you so."

"And you did n't move?"

She shook her head. "I was very happy. I did not want to move." She rose stiffly and steadied herself against the tree against which she had been leaning. "I do not care how long the strike will last," she added rebelliously.

Lacking an answer, he picked up the basket. The fire had been long reduced to a patch of ash that lay, white, in the middle of the little glade. It suggested a burned-out altar.

Their eyes met and Greta turned into the trail, walking quickly, her head high. At the edge of the clearing she stopped suddenly and pointed into the bush.

"There 's some one there."

Kenneth started and caught the sound of quick steps in the underbrush. "Holloa!" he said sharply.

The crackling increased till, with a snapping of twigs, a man strode into the open in front of them. It was Sanders. He stood tall, lean, and

menacing, his brows tightened into a heavy black line, his eyes hot and angry.

Greta shrank back instinctively, but her gaze did not falter. "Where did you come from?" she demanded.

Sanders laughed grimly. "I 've been watching your pleasant little party for the last hour or two. I saw you come in here and I came after you. Understand?" he added meaningly.

Kenneth was furious. "Is it any of your business?"

"It might have been," snapped Sanders significantly.

"What do you mean?" The lad's muscles were swelling into knots.

"What do I mean? Well, just this. I was ready to finish you and, by God! I 'd have done it," he stammered, "if, if—"

Greta started violently and stared at Kenneth with swift comprehension. Her temples were scarlet. But Kenneth only threw off his coat and sprang forward. "Will you settle it now?"

The foreman laughed contemptuously. "Think it over and you 'll get it. As for fighting, you 'll have a bellyful before long."

Then after a long stare at the girl, he plunged back into the woods.

CHAPTER XVII

ON the second day of the strike, Pethick betook himself to the office of Jackson Chambers, where he sat for an hour talking earnestly. In making Chambers his trustee and guardian to Sylvia, old James Percival had not intended that he should have any part in the actual management of the factory. Ten years before he died, the owner picked out Pethick, and there had been a peculiar satisfaction in watching the young man come on. Temperamentally calm and naturally shrewd, the latter absorbed the doctrines of his employer, and it was not long before the essential necessity for profit-making meant even more to him than to the owner. The weekly factory reports began to represent something bigger than mere records, being primarily the reflection of his own management. A fractional increase of cost was a black mark, and something for which he held himself strictly accountable. But with a little more pressure here and a little more exaction elsewhere, the repetition of the thing was avoidable. Ultimately Pethick developed into one on guard against his fellows, cautious lest a workman ac-

quire undue influence, and avaricious for the last fraction of labor he could extract. He was mean and in his own soul knew it, but used his meanness to advance his usefulness. Within six months of James Percival's death he felt that the factory was in the hollow of his hand.

And since those in authority automatically reproduce their own views in others, it came that the factory was a hive of suspicion. Men worked there because they had to. In the old man's time there existed a grim satisfaction among the senior employees that they had been with Percival since he started. There used to be nods and occasional handshakes and gruff salutations. Percival was a bit of a driver, but he played fair. One knew where one stood and there was no crooked work. Now everything had changed. Pethick at thirty-five held the reins that had dropped from the fingers of seventy. But Pethick used spurs and tightened the curb.

About Sylvia there were many views in the factory, but most disliked the old man's daughter. There had been too frequent glimpses of a shining motor that slid smoothly up the street, of a dainty creature who seldom got out, but spoke to Pethick for a few moments from where she sat, after which with a purring of the machine, the girl would vanish. Little was said. Women glanced

at her with curious expression, men's lips tightened, and children stared and sometimes rolled their hoops against the glistening wheels. Once Sylvia, arriving at noon, had progressed cautiously up the street against the outpouring tide. While the car wedged itself through a sea of faces, she had been conscious of hundreds of eyes that appeared strange and remote. They were not forbidding, only cold and critical. She felt herself being examined and appraised by successive brains that having sold themselves for a few hours were now free to come to their own conclusions.

It was not till the strike actually began that Pethick felt the need of counsel. Affairs in the factory had so often come near the breaking point and just as often were they smoothed out by a fractional concession. He looked on the men as a herd divided between fear and unrest. Here and there one stood out stronger and more dangerous than the others, but there were always means of dealing with such cases. With Sohmer it was different. Pethick had never been easy about Sohmer, but conceived a curious respect for him, born of the consciousness that there was something in him not to be reached by any standard method. And it was, as much as anything else, the memory of Sohmer's face as he turned to the

office door that now led Pethick to consult with Jackson Chambers.

The lawyer heard him and stroked his beard thoughtfully. This was the first time Pethick had broached the subject of labor troubles, and he spoke almost with indignation that men could be so shortsighted. Presently Chambers interrupted.

“Just how much was involved?”

“About twenty thousand a year. The thing is absurd.”

Chambers swung in his chair and opening the door of the safe fished out a packet. Selecting one paper he scanned it intently. “Humph! How long do you think the men will stay out?”

“That’s more than I can say, but there should n’t be any difficulty in getting help.”

“As good help?”

“Not at first.”

“And at the old wages?”

“I guess so.”

Chambers looked out of the window. The trees were already thickening into bud and next week he would get some golf. The reflection softened him. There were so many who never got any golf.

“Do you think,” he said slowly, “that apart

from its effect on the year's profits there 's any justice in what the men say? Mind you, I 'm only trying to see it from both sides; one has to, to give an opinion that 's worth anything."

Pethick glanced at him swiftly. "It 's hard enough on them, I admit that, but you can say the same of every factory hand in the country. It is n't one increase I 'm afraid of; it 's the next, and the next, till the thing is impossible. Prices are up, I know, but will they agree to a reduction if prices go down? Not much. Then where do we get off?"

Chambers seemed a little troubled. Mentally he was on edge to justify Pethick, sentimentally he was distinctly uncomfortable. "Twenty thousand a year seems a lot, but when you divide it up among five hundred it means forty dollars apiece."

"You don't figure it that way, do you?" Pethick's tone had a shade of contempt.

"No," said Chambers simply, "I was just questioning whether forty dollars a year could make any material difference to any one."

"It is n't altogether the amount, it 's the principle. If you knuckle down now, you do it for all time. What about the next forty?"

"I wonder," hazarded Chambers reflectively.

He dropped into thought. His late client had

run the factory for thirty years without a strike. Chambers, like other discerning men, had of late held his ear to the ground, and caught rumblings that sounded as though deep forces were stirring somewhere. It had been his business to protect those who tossed about capital and labor as though in a game, but now he began to question whether the man in overalls would much longer play the pawn on the modern chessboard. Always, however, just when revolt was imminent the inflexible machine scored over an unwieldy opposition, unwieldy through its very mass. Labor, he concluded, was not wise enough to employ brains on its own behalf, or perhaps it was that capital already controlled a monopoly of purchasable brains. He glanced at Pethick, who sat clothed in garments of authority. Behind Pethick loomed an endless phalanx of other employers on whom he could call to strengthen his position, and at this Chambers experienced a sudden distaste for his own job.

"You 're going to advertise for more men?" he queried.

Pethick nodded. "That may make a little trouble, but we 've got to go through with it."

"Have any of the old hands talked?"

"Not yet. I 'm going to put up a notice that before anything else they 've got to come back to

work. The job is open to them for ten days."

"Why ten days?"

"The first few are a holiday," said Pethick grimly, "but the shoe soon begins to pinch. There may be a sort of exhilaration about chucking your place, but it does n't last long. Freedom is n't what it's cracked up to be without a pay envelope, and though men think they can do a lot, when it comes to the scratch it's another matter. Besides,"—he hesitated—"the women are the ones who settle a strike in the long run."

Chambers experienced a sudden revulsion. "I suppose we'll have to go through with it now it's started," he said with a touch of depression. "You'll agree that it's better to say nothing to Miss Percival at present. She won't be back for a few months and it ought to be over long before that, eh?"

Pethick shook his head decisively. "That would make no end of trouble. Miss Percival can't be expected to understand and it would be very unfortunate if—"

"If she did," put in Chambers shrewdly. "Probably you're quite right. By the way, just what did you offer?"

"Two per cent. increase; they asked eight."

"Two per cent." The lawyer ruminated. "That is n't much difference."

"You can't figure it that way," protested Pethick.

"No," said Chambers thoughtfully, "I'm hanged if I can." And at that Pethick left him.

Bertha Chambers's views of the strike were rather chaotic. Her husband had said very little except that it was one of those things which were unavoidable and for which all employers must unfortunately be prepared. But she herself was somewhat frightened. Strikes, riots, and bloodshed were to her a malevolent trinity and not to be divorced from each other. There was a headline in the morning papers, and an interview with Pethick in which he sounded regretful and almost sympathetic. Sohmer and the others were not ready to speak. As far as Bertha Chambers could see, appearances were a little against the strikers. She was vastly relieved that Sylvia was still in Europe.

This thought was uppermost when, motoring toward her husband's office, her car was caught in a jam of traffic. She glanced at the pavement. It was crowded with a homeward hurrying throng. Presently into a little gap stepped a tall figure that she instantly recognized. After a word to the chauffeur she alighted hastily and, with a total lack of dignity, dived forward. Grasping her parasol she prodded a slim, blue-clad back.

“Kenneth, Kenneth, stop this minute.”

He started, wheeled quickly, and stared into her eyes. They bored into his own with a sharp resolution.

“Don’t run away again, I want to speak to you. Where can we talk?”

Kenneth laughed. The sound of her voice had happily suggested that there were still people in the world to whom he meant something. The animation in her face, the waiting car, the quiet perfection of her dress, the thought that he could go and dine with her if he would, all came like a ray of light into a mind dark and weary with forebodings. He had almost begun to feel like an outcast.

“How do you do?” he said cheerfully. “No, I won’t run away.”

“Will you get into my car?”

He glanced into a shop window. “Won’t you come and have some ice cream? I’m not exactly dressed for your car.”

Her eyes twinkled shrewdly. “Yes, I will; I’ve got exactly fifteen minutes. How is your father?”

“I think he’s better. He knew me last time and they say he’ll pull through now, but it’s rather dreadful. I heard you’d been to see him.” He led the way into a rear parlor in which were small

glassy-topped tables and cane-seated chairs. Here he ordered ice cream for two.

"I didn't quite finish my talk with you last autumn," she began firmly. "Now how long does this nonsense last?"

It was on the tip of his tongue to say "For two months." He had reckoned so long on a certain date. Then, realizing that the curtain would fall in a fortnight at most, he temporized. "Till Sylvia gets back."

"You mean this foolishness goes on till June?"

The ice cream arrived with a clatter. She regarded its pink mound suspiciously and promptly pushed it away. "Disgusting, don't eat it."

He swallowed a spoonful. "It's first rate. I'm not as particular as I used to be."

She surveyed him critically. He was vastly different from the youth who used to visit Sylvia. His shoulders were broader and somehow thicker; he was less lissom and moved with a certain deliberation that seemed strange in one so young. His hands, especially, were stronger and more massive, the finger tips slightly broadened. He had acquired a dignity, it appeared, in which she missed a casual joyousness remembered of old. His face was graver, with a suggestion of a fine vertical line between his brows. She appraised him rapidly, chiefly conscious that between

them the disparity of age seemed to have vanished. He struck her now as one who must be taken seriously.

"I heard from Sylvia last week," she put in severely.

"So did I. She—" he regarded her ruefully—"she seems rather vexed with me."

"Don't you think she's perfectly right?"

Kenneth carved his ice cream into a square block that looked like a factory building. He was thinking hard. In Mrs. Chambers's face there was no accusation, no distrust. She was palpably and enormously inquisitive and wanted to know, and he felt too that for him she had something that was almost affection. She would be a good friend, and just now he needed friends.

"I want to tell you the whole thing," he said, looking straight into her face. "I really do. But I can only tell you if you promise to say nothing till Sylvia gets back. I've got to ask this because it affects others than myself. I'm tremendously in earnest; I really am."

She quivered with interest. "You don't want me to say anything even to my husband?" There was a peculiar fascination in the idea of knowing something that Jackson Chambers did not know.

He shook his head. "Not to him, especially.

It must not go any further than yourself. You 'd understand if you knew."

She experienced a delicious thrill. "Very well, I promise—till Sylvia returns. Now!"

Kenneth drew a long breath and began steadily, pitching his mind back to the day when he found his father helpless. It seemed at first that there was almost too much to be said, and the impossibility of putting the thing as he felt it left his words cold and pointless. But Bertha Chambers only settled in her chair and regarded him with increasing wonder.

"Go on," she said, "please."

It was an uneven tale. Sometimes, as he told of them, the biggest figures in his story looked out of drawing, but he was nerved by the knowledge that what he did tell was life—life as once he had never dreamt it. Of Sohmer he spoke with an unconscious homage that moved his hearer mightily. Of Greta he could not make himself say much, but his omissions were not the less eloquent. Gradually it appeared to Bertha Chambers that the very walls of the factory had been removed and she was staring straight into the hearts of those who heretofore had meant nothing to her. There came a queer sensation of living and feeling incredibly swiftly. By the time Kenneth reached the events

leading up to the strike, she was tense with excitement, till, as the story unfolded, there came a strange weariness of soul. Kenneth, had he known it, was ripping away those modulated barriers which had screened the world from her vision.

He paused, breathless. The quarter hour had long since passed. Jackson Chambers had reached home in a democratic trolley car, but his wife sat oblivious, while Kenneth hurried on.

“It is impossible, now, that Sylvia won’t understand. Don’t you see it is the biggest opening imaginable? I’ve been through it and I know. It need n’t mean much sacrifice of our income, and I want these people to appreciate her as she really is. They’re not unreasonable, and I wonder sometimes they have n’t broken loose and helped themselves. I think they would, if it were not for Sohmer. You’ve got to know him, he’s,”—Kenneth paused and went on in lower tones,—“he’s something like Christ, and even his smile is sad. He understands; that’s the only way I can put it. We’ve just got to try and prevent any trouble till Sylvia gets back. But if any one at the factory guessed who I was, it would make no end of trouble. I’d be called a spy at once. Here’s Sylvia’s cablegram, I did n’t show it to you.” He pulled it from his pocket.

Mrs. Chambers glanced at it. "Does no one know who you are?"

"Only Greta." He blushed furiously.

"And why"—there was a slight quiver in the voice—"why did you tell her?"

"I—I had to," he blurted, crimson to his temples. "It was only fair," he added with an effort.

"Ah!" There was a flutter in the lace at Bertha Chambers's throat.

"Please," he begged, "don't misunderstand me. It's rather hopeless to try and tell you."

"Is that the girl I saw you with last year?"

He nodded. It appeared that now it was for him to put Greta on record and in no uncertain way, but this seemed as difficult as to delineate her father. He could read Mrs. Chambers's thoughts.

"You've seen people who were entirely different from their surroundings—Greta is like that, and she has never had a chance. I believe she could do anything—or fill any place. She's full of courage, and I admire her tremendously, and so would you. She would be a sort of refuge of a wife to any man, and he could always count on her, especially if he were up against it."

Bertha Chambers stiffened slightly. "Have you told Sylvia about Greta?"

"No," he hesitated, "she could n't have understood."

"I don't believe she could." This with a touch of austerity.

Kenneth's eyes, dwelling on her pleadingly, were so transparently honest that she relented. But with her knowledge of Sylvia, it appeared that Kenneth was counting on his fiancée for a good deal. She said so as gently as she could.

"But you don't know Sylvia. This has been a sort of test year for both of us, and she started at once when I cabled. You make me rather uncomfortable. Don't you think I've done right, all through?"

Mrs. Chambers looked at her watch and rose hurriedly. "You're a dear quixotic boy and you deserve to be happy. I've promised not to mention this till Sylvia gets back and I won't. I believe you've done what you felt was right and climbed up on a sort of altar of self-sacrifice, but I'm not sure whether it was a wise thing to expect Sylvia to climb up beside you without telling her why. But that will clear itself up in a few days. So now promise me one thing."

"All right, what is it?"

"It's about your friend Greta," she said warningly.

“Yes, please go on.”

“I’ve an idea that the affection of such a girl as you describe may be a stronger thing than perhaps you imagine—” She looked at him wistfully and continued. “You told her who you were because in fairness to her you had to, and I quite understand. But don’t put yourself in the position of doing anything else because you think you have to.” A faint tinge of pink mounted to her temples as she turned to the door.

Forty minutes later she entered her drawing-room slightly flurried. Dinner had been announced and Jackson Chambers stood in wonderment in front of the fire. That his wife should be behindhand, was incredible. Whisked into the dining-room, he dallied with his soup and regarded her expectantly. She met his gaze with a whimsical smile that he found captivating. She seemed astir with such unusual energy that he had a charming vision of the Bertha of thirty years ago.

“Jackson, please tell me about the strike,” she began abruptly.

He experienced a violent revulsion. The strike was filed neatly away in his office and with it certain disquieting reflections which had become almost reiterant. The evening was wrecked at the very outset.

"Is it necessary to introduce that subject with the soup?"

"Don't you want me to be intelligent?"

"It's all right," he countered resignedly. "What is it you want to know?"

"Who do you say is right?" she demanded thoughtfully.

"The company." There was a note of decision in his voice.

"But whom do you feel is right?" she persisted unsatisfied.

"Both," he growled with inward relief.

"Then of course everything will be settled. I'm so glad."

"My experience is that the thing is most difficult to settle," said Chambers doubtfully, "when both are right. Neither wants to let go."

"What does Mr. Pethick say? You know I don't like him."

He smiled dryly. "Pethick is standing on the principle that this is only the thin end of the wedge, and if he gives in now it is for all time. Naturally I am expected to support him, but it's one of those things one can't stomach very cheerfully."

His wife reflected. She had a vision of Kenneth, who was telling her things about a strike which she had never dreamed before. "So it's

you and Mr. Pethick on one side and two thousand people on the other?"

"Why two thousand?" he came back shortly.

"I understand that there are five hundred workmen in the factory and most of them have families. Have n't you always told me that?"

"Have I?" he said curiously.

She went on swiftly. "Have you sent word to Sylvia?"

"No, it's hardly a matter for her."

"Can you imagine any circumstances under which she could help?" suggested his wife.

"None whatever, and it would be a disadvantage to all if she were to attempt it. The men will drift in gradually and then if Pethick is anything of a psychologist, he will give them a raise. I have advised that."

"But does n't it seem a strange thing that Sylvia should be so helpless where her own interests are concerned?"

"Wise people," said Chambers a trifle sententiously, "don't engage women to settle labor troubles."

She glanced at him with a sudden and baffling smile. "I believe you're perfectly right, Jackson." And not another word could he extract.

CHAPTER XVIII

BY the end of the first week many of the strikers were in an ugly mood. Pethick's notice had set up a time limit for submission, and it was now known that employment agents were arranging to fill up the ranks. This put the majority of the committee on edge, notably Sanders and Erickson. One was hot, scathing, and threatening; the other, silent and deadly. Sohmer moved about, seemingly placid as before, but with a shadow in his eyes. Kenneth, watching, was assured that by some mysterious method Sohmer had known what was coming. This conviction invested the giant with a strange and inspiring significance.

In this week, especially, Greta seemed transfigured. Quietly and deliberately she hid within her breast the truth of her love, and from this secret place there radiated a superb interpretation of life. Not by any look or sign did she suggest that her father's house differed now from what it was before, and in deft and innumerable ways she maintained the every-day atmosphere of work. During the hours when the men should have been at the factory she seemed hardly con-

scious of their presence, and to every meal she added dishes of her own, as though this were the season to pay tribute to the wage-earner. She brought continually to bear upon these anxious days a rare and delicate understanding, the outcome not of any obvious existence but of her more intimate and elusive self.

At the news that Pethick intended to employ outside labor, the committee met hurriedly. There was now no need for concealment. Sohmer's house was recognized as headquarters, and the giant shouldered a double burden without protest. Men came to him, made suggestions, accepted his decision, and went away content. But Sanders and Erickson grew hourly more unruly and attended the meeting in open revolt. Miller, Trufitt, and Peters were also beginning to waver.

Sohmer spoke first. They were, he said, so far carrying out their intentions. Nothing had happened that they had not expected, and he was glad that no damage had been done because it would only come back on themselves. Outside labor, he believed, had promised help. He concluded with a significant glance at Miller, as though counting on support from that quarter.

Miller expressed himself carefully, as became a master mechanic. He deprecated violence or destruction, for, knowing better than the rest what

machinery cost, he mentally revolted at the thought of wrecking it. As for his own men, they would hang together. While he talked, Erickson stared at him with dull interest. Here it seemed was one who, though he worked for others, had learned to take care of himself. The Scandinavian had a touch of envy, then stretched his great muscles with relief.

Sanders was up before Miller finished, and Kenneth recognized in him the firebrand. When the foreman spoke it was in a high-pitched, ragged voice that betrayed the tension of his restless brain. His eyes roved to Kenneth, dwelt on him insolently for a moment, moved excitedly round the table and fixed on Sohmer. It became clear that through Sanders, and in no other way, must Sohmer control the unruly element.

"I 've heard nothing except what we must n't do," said the foreman disgustedly. "It seems to me this is a sort of Sunday-school meeting with Pethick for a teacher, and I 'm sick of it. There are some things we 've got to do darned quick. Have we sent out any pickets yet—not one. Any one tried to put the fear of God into those employment agents?—no one. Has our view been given to the papers like the company's—nothing said. It seems to me we 're just leaning back and doing nothing, for fear we do something Pethick don't

like. To hell with this strike; it's a joke and the joke's on us. That's what I say." He thrust his lean face close to Erickson's. "What about you, you big Swede; are you going to let Pethick walk all over you, too?"

The blond man slowly shook his gigantic head. Resentment had rankled in his breast ever since Bennett stopped those friendly trips to the machine shop. Sometimes he stared at his massive arms, on which the corded muscles were ridged like ropes, and wondered what it would feel like to be able again to hit a man with them; to hit, perhaps, many men. He saw his two fists gripping the throats of Pethick and Bennett, and the vision was strangely comforting. Finally he caught the steady gaze of Sohmer.

"I don't know," he said hesitating. "If we are to fight, I shall be glad, yes. I have not fought since I left Christiansund, and"—his voice rumbled deeper while a cold flicker began to dance in his eyes—"that was very good. They were all men in Christiansund. It does not matter anything about this at all, but I would like to fight if I had no woman."

Sanders gnawed at his mustache and swung suddenly. "What about you, Anderson; you have n't said much."

Kenneth started. At that moment he was try-

ing to decipher the inner Sanders, where there seemed to be a quality that only needed control to carry him far. Sanders had been ready to kill him the week before and, he admitted, Sanders was right. Later he would try and keep in special touch, and once Pethick was out of the way it would not be difficult. Then, by and by, Sanders would marry Greta. Presently he realized that the eyes of the group were on him.

"It is hard for me to say." His cheeks were crimson. "I have n't earned the right to say anything yet. I'm not married, but if I were, I'd want to do the best I could for my family. This is going to come out all right." He spoke haltingly, unwilling to say that for which he might be sorry, but chiefly conscious of long rows of small houses tenanted by women and children waiting wistfully for the decision of the toiler who had at last taken affairs, their affairs, into his own hands. He seemed to himself hideously deceptive. Even the hatred in Sanders's breast was a better thing than this. "Look here, you fellows," he burst out, "I think I can—"

"It is not well impulsive to be," broke in Sohmmer with a peculiar note of warning which silenced him abruptly. "What is done we for ourselves must do."

"Not the way you're going about it," inter-

rupted Sanders; "not in a thousand years. Now, see, I 'm willing to stand by for a week, and if your peace at any price has n't any result by then, it 's no good. I don't reckon it 's any good anyway, and just for one reason. You figure on making an impression by arguing, but does Pethick strike you that way? Not by a damn sight. The reason your plan is n't going to work out is because you 've got nothing to play with. But when we start the new game we 're going to have something. Eh! Erickson, what about that?"

A curious change came over the Swede's face, while his eyes seemed to recede and contemplate a prospect so big that it impressed him. "Ya, if it comes to that, we shall have something—many things."

"What are you two driving at?" said Peters nervously. "I know, you are going to start trouble and get us all into it so far that we 'll never get out. You stop them, Sohmer." He turned to the giant excitedly. "Now I 've told you, you watch them."

Sanders broke in disgustedly. "What did you expect, an apology from Pethick and everything we asked for? Not much. There 's only one way to get under his skin."

"So?" said the giant at the end of the table.

Erickson's blue orbs brightened coldly, but San-

ders leaned forward. "And the way to get under his skin is to scare him stiff. And that's easy and no more expensive than he makes it."

"What are you up to anyway?" put in Miller suddenly.

"I'll tell you in a week. Till then,"—Sanders laughed sardonically—"I'll be good and come to Sunday school, but after that we don't give a damn whether school keeps or not. You tell the boys, Sohmer, that we had a most harmonious meeting. So long. Come on, Erickson."

Sohmer sighed as they tramped out. "It is not often those who make the war that can also the peace make. You understand,"—here he glanced at Miller—"what is Sanders's meaning?"

The mechanic nodded. "Yes, but he'd better keep his hands off my shop. I'm in this up to the neck, but, by God! if it comes to smashing things to make Pethick squeal, he can smash something else. Will you see about the pickets? He's right, there."

"And what about something in the papers?" put in Peters. "That ought to help."

"Yes," said Sohmer, "if as we wish, one could print it. But,"—he paused and continued bitterly—"the workingman does not advertise. Those who the papers own also make out the bills for advertisements, and every month from the

company comes the cheque. What kind of customers are Sanders and Miller and Sohmer? If by and by I am killed, then the papers of me news will make, for in me something of interest they will see. But till then—" He stopped dejectedly.

Kenneth looked at him quickly. Miller was staring, too. For the moment Sohmer had ceased to be conscious of their presence. He appeared to have struck up communication with something distant and mysterious, and to exchange with it signals incomprehensible to the others. "It was always like this," he murmured, "and not ever till afterwards did they understand." His eyes closed for a moment. When they opened his face was benignant and strangely tender.

Miller spoke indistinctly, fumbled with his hat, and went out with Peters. Sohmer sat motionless till, rising heavily, his hand rested on Kenneth's shoulder.

"The door is nearly open now, my friend."

He mounted the narrow stairs. His wife was sitting on their bed, twisting her red hands, her cheeks stained with tears. He put his great arm around her.

"We have together seen much, little one. So, are you strong, for more?"

She shook her head convulsively. "No, no, let

us go now. We have money and I am afraid."

"Yes, I know, I am afraid, too."

She wiped her eyes. "You, Jacob, afraid?"

"Yes, for many things. These people do not understand."

"But you have told them, isn't it?" she said helplessly.

"Much have I told them, but I am but one. So! It is written that all this must come."

"Then take me away first—now! Jacob, I have not before told you but I am frightened, and, too, I am very tired. For years in Brunton always have I smiled, and it is not always easy to smile. Let us go to Stockholm. For Greta, too, it will be well."

Sohmer smiled down at her compassionately. The afternoon sunlight struck in through the small window and fell on his yellow beard till he seemed like a great golden god. "About Greta you are not happy? It is what you told me before."

"Yes, I have told you, so long ago it began, last summer. Greta not now the same is, and I do not understand. Her body is of my body the child, but inside it is different. She loves this Anderson, although I do not think that is his name."

"No," said Sohmer gently, "also I do not think so."

“Then what is it?”

“I have not asked, for he my friend is. That he cannot marry Greta he has told me; that was honest. But the rest I cannot see.” Once more his eyes peered into some mysterious distance while his lips moved inaudibly. His wife glanced up at him, then took the great hand and held it against her cheek. They sat thus without moving, till his voice began in soft, hollow tones.

“That is what he has told me and it was hard to tell. But, little one, something else has spoken, I know not what, that when a girl like Greta loves as Greta loves, it is not wise to say what shall and what shall not be. I do not see,”—his eyes narrowed once more—“I do not see our daughter lonely and unloved to be, and for us there will be time for rest and to remember many things.”

“Is it that you will win?” she said uncertainly.

He nodded gravely. “So, I shall win, but perhaps the others will not win.”

She stared in wonder. Was Jacob to desert those who followed him? “I do not understand.” She shivered a little. It was as though Sohmer were speaking to some one she could not see.

“It has not been easy to smile,” he went on quietly; “no, I believe that. But you have been happy, is it not so?”

A sense of parting and infinite tribulation enveloped her like a fog. It was not Sohmer's habit to speak much of the past, and always he had found something to look forward to. Now it appeared that the future had spoken for itself, and, not being able to bear it, he was deliberately searching the years that were ended in which to find something to be thankful for. It had always seemed, too, that he was in a way permanent, and immune to the things that ended existence for others. And this was perhaps because of his extraordinarily ageless face, neither young nor old, which reminded her at rare and startling intervals that while she herself reflected the wear and effort of life, Sohmer yielded nothing of his peculiar and baffling qualities. At this moment everything she had leaned on was threatened by that which instinct warned her was inevitable. She clung to him breathlessly.

"Always you have been good to me, Jacob, always; so good that I cannot tell. And Greta, too, when we breathe, we love you; it is like that. I cannot explain."

Sohmer sighed heavily and took her in his great embrace. His lips moved as though in a voiceless benediction; his features were pale, luminous, and mystical.

CHAPTER XIX

FROM New York, Sylvia telegraphed to Mrs. Chambers to expect her next day, asking also that nothing be said to Kenneth. The voyage had decided her that the mystery need not be all on his side, and, consumed with curiosity, she had a sudden desire to explore that at which she had been wondering for months. Kenneth's surroundings, his occupation, his ambition and the reason behind it, of all these Bertha Chambers had told her nothing. She puzzled now over the means by which Kenneth could hide himself in Brunton; then, as the train carried her homeward, gave way to a day-dream in which he and Amaro became inextricably involved.

Crossing the line, the great brown plains of Ontario spread before her, relieved with the first faint suggestion of green. They looked strangely bare, the farm houses unexplainably small. The air was cold and hard. There was something relentless and inhospitable about it. The very ground, sullen and defiant, seemed to hug the framework of the earth, to disclaim kinship with the plodding figures of the laborers and to announce

that only after infinite toil would it be persuaded to smile into harvest. The stations at which they stopped were bleak and wind-smitten, where people huddled behind corners and stamped their feet. Sylvia experienced a longing that was almost hunger for the lisp of the Mediterranean, the whisper of olive trees and the exquisite odor of flower-strewn slopes, till, with a throb of thankfulness, she remembered that all this was hers if she would have it. What lay before her was to humor and conciliate, then take the good things destiny had sent her.

Early that morning she bought a Brunton paper and stared at the headlines with startled fascination. Part of the front page was devoted to the great strike at the Consumers' Rubber Company Works. With amazement she read that it had now lasted ten days, and instantly grasped that it had commenced on the date on which she left Mentone at Kenneth's imperative call. She read on, her hands trembling. It was stated that the company had suggested a compromise, which was refused by the men's committee, the latter headed by a workman called Sohmer. The attitude of the company still remained unchanged. Here followed Pethick's formal advertisement. Among the men, sentiment differed somewhat. A few seemed ready to compromise, but the great majority were un-

able to accept it, owing, they said, to the cost of living. Pethick refusing to make any statement had repeatedly sent the reporter to Chambers. The latter regretted the situation, but, owing to the inexorable laws of supply and demand, could not yield any further, competition being such that should a certain wage scale be exceeded it would be necessary to close the factory permanently. Sohmer, on behalf of the men, had referred the reporters to a tabulation showing the increase in the cost of rent and of food products in the last fifteen years, and, coupled with this, a statement setting forth the wage increase granted by the Consumers' Company in the same period. "How," he had asked, "was the difference to be made up?"

The article concluded by dwelling on the importance of the industry to Brunton, the good-will that in former days existed between the late Mr. James Percival and his employees, and expressed the hope that some middle ground would be found without further delay. In the meantime there was no violence and the factory was well guarded.

Sylvia stared at this till it dissolved into a blur. She was conscious above all else that the machine that for so many years had droned out its implacable chant had now stopped. It was not so much what had stopped it, as the fact itself. With this came the blinding realization that Kenneth had

known it was going to stop and sent for her. How did he know? Why had Chambers not written or cabled? The past nine months melted away, and as the train glided into Brunton the old oppression returned with redoubled weight. She felt frightened and helpless. A moment later she was in the arms of Bertha Chambers.

"My dear," said the latter, after an ecstatic embrace, "you're looking perfectly lovely. The Continent has agreed with you, has n't it, Jackson?"

Sylvia kissed her. There was something vastly consoling in the comfortable pressure of those arms. She had a moment's amazement that these two could be so cheerful.

Chambers looked at her with interest. "You've—you've found yourself, Sylvia. 'Pon my word, I'm rather afraid of you now."

Mrs. Chambers, too, was forming swift impressions. This was a new Sylvia, in whom the old charm and grace had been touched by an exquisite piquancy into something extraordinarily attractive. Her figure had developed and her dress suggested its subtle curves. She was older but, in a way, younger, seeming to have grasped the spirit of youth and to reflect it in every glance and gesture. The poise of head and neck, the indefinite touches of pride, the subtle exhalation of

womanhood, a certain natural languor, eloquent of perfect nerves and health, all these radiated an atmosphere that drew Chambers's eyes to his wife and caused them to exchange a mutual approval. Then he noted the paper in the girl's hand.

"Of course you 're not worrying about that?"

Sylvia sighed with relief. It had been on her lips for an hour. "Yes, I was, a good deal. You see I did n't know anything about it."

Chambers, though he had been exhorted to ask no reason for Sylvia's sudden return, experienced a keen curiosity. Sylvia was here, and the strike was on, and this combination he would have given much to avoid.

"Don't judge by what you read there," he said evenly; "it 's a temporary disagreement only, unfortunate but unavoidable. A few men will probably start to-day and the whole thing will be over in a week."

The girl's heart lightened, but her wonder remained. "You did n't say anything to me about it. Why?" She was wistful and a trifle hurt.

He laughed. "Why should I? It 's out of your province. Now I 'm off to my office, but I 'll try and come up for lunch. Good-by, you two, and don't say it all at once, Sylvia, but keep some for me." He put them into the car, waved his hand, and disappeared.

"Now," Sylvia turned swiftly, "tell me about Kenneth."

Her aunt drew a long breath. "My dear," she said with the slightest quiver in her tones, "Kenneth is working in the factory, your factory; at least he was till the strike began."

"You don't mean that!"

"I do. It sounds perfectly extraordinary, I know, but it's perfectly true. Before I say anything else, I beg you not to form any opinion off-hand, for there's a great deal to be said, and Kenneth will put it much better than I can. In a way he's been quite a hero, and I admire him for it, though I don't pretend to understand him, entirely. He told me all about it a few days ago when we met accidentally, and made me promise to say nothing till you arrived."

"Then that's how he knew the strike was coming." Sylvia's tones were passionless.

"Of course. He lives with a man called Sohmer whom he thinks is something like Christ, and what he told me about him is quite wonderful."

Sylvia appeared not to have heard her. She sat back, her eyes clouded, her lips parted in dismay. "But if he wanted to go into the factory—and I thought he always disliked the idea—it would have been so easy. Why did he take the men's side?"

"That, my dear, is something he will have to

explain, but I do know he 's tremendously in earnest."

The girl recoiled ever so slightly. She did not want Kenneth to be tremendously in earnest except about herself. "Has—has he changed at all?"

Mrs. Chambers nodded with unusual conviction. "Yes, a good deal, and in a curious way that rather appeals, at least to me."

"And you say he 's been living with—"

"Don't worry about anything until you've heard the whole story." Her aunt patted the slim hand affectionately. "Kenneth never looked so well before, or so much a man. You 'll be together very soon, and after he 's seen you, my dear, you 'll be able to judge for yourself; and if he 's got eyes in his head, he 'll come to a few conclusions on his own account. I might as well say that it has n't been easy for him, and there 's been no lack of temptations."

Sylvia colored. "The temptations are n't all in Brunton."

"But you still love him?" Mrs. Chambers's voice took on an altered note.

"Of course"—the intonation was baffling. "But I can't see any reason for this experiment. When I left Brunton I was very much in love with him, and it made me very happy. Then came his

father's illness, and he wrote me that he was doing practical hard work, but did n't say where. He need not have been forced into that, and I told him so, but he insisted, and for a while I loved him just as much as ever. When I wanted him to come over for Christmas that was impossible, and I was very disappointed, but I did n't propose to spoil things by moping, and—and I did n't mope. Then came the cable, and here I am to find out that he's gone over to the men's side in our factory, and that that was the secret I was n't to know till I got back. He asked me to trust him, Aunt Bertha, and I did, but do you think he has trusted me?" The girl's voice trembled as she finished. She had a sense that Kenneth had been traitorous to property, the thing that now loomed so significantly in her own mind.

The elder woman thought hard. This promised to be a difficult hour for Kenneth, and she must be very wise. There came a swift vision of Greta, her blue eyes and white throat. Kenneth had been loyal there, and Mrs. Chambers's heart went out to him.

"I feel," she said slowly, "that he has been trying to make himself into something he thinks more worthy of you and your future. Would you"—she hesitated—"not have approved if you had known?"

Sylvia shook her head. "It was too unnecessary."

"Then that was why he said nothing," replied the older woman suavely. "And here we are at home. Now I 'll send for your voluntary martyr."

CHAPTER XX

THE summons found Kenneth deep in conversation with Sohmer. Sitting in the little parlor, they could hear the women moving quietly about. Occasionally Greta stopped at the door for no other reason than to see these two together. She was pale but self-possessed. The inevitable had chilled her very soul, but by no sign did she evidence the poignancy of the hour.

For days Kenneth had been feeling strangely like a deserter. He was about to leave all this forever, but the fact that it was to be exchanged for comfort and ease only endowed it with an intense pathos, with supremely human attributes which, he decided, were irreplaceable. The time had come when he wondered just how much this house of Sohmer had fortified his courage, and whether, lacking its gentle and intimate suggestiveness, he would dare to follow the bidding of his own resolve. He was impelled to seize on all that could be carried with him.

Sohmer, too, seemed touched. Benignant as ever, he now radiated a massive tenderness that tinged his words with quiet affection. Kenneth,

listening, perceived the profundity of the giant's belief.

"You will go on and prosper, yes, but for too much you must not expect. It will be hard, very hard sometimes, and there will not come help from where you look, but all men who are in earnest lonely must be also. This thing we both want is like a tree, not a volcano. One cannot in any way see it grow, but it grows nevertheless. And so in it the work of any one man is not to be found by itself, but all men satisfied must be to have it seem that their work is lost. So it will be for you and then this you will remember, with other things. It is hard," he added with intense meaning, "for the man who has much, also to do much."

"Why do you say that?"

"From the beginning it was so," answered Sohmer evenly.

Kenneth experienced a strange breathlessness. Gravity, sympathy, and a certain divine assurance were in the deep voice.

"You hope," continued Sohmer, "to do much for labor, yes! But the laborer will not in the world take his right place till the labor itself has uplifted him; then all people will be glad. While the man does the work of a brute, so long will he of a brute the pay receive. It is the world's way,

and so long will there be strikes, and riots, yes, and perhaps for a little while labor will win. But victor it will not stay, because it is hot. To-day it is the cold men that win—not so many mistakes do they make.”

A wave of despondency swept over his hearer. Pethick was a cold man. He would probably win. Sohmer caught the shadow in the youth's eyes.

“But this must not make you sad; you will not be alone.”

“Is it love you mean?” The answer was unsteady. “Is that going to pull me through?”

“Yes,” said Sohmer simply, “if love it is.”

At that there fell a silence in which Kenneth pictured Sylvia with all her charm. Where, he wondered, in her unawakened breast did love lie, the quality of love of which he dreamed, with its daring, its fixity, and passionate attachment.

“Again, think,” went on Sohmer, “to-day it is science, not labor, that rules, the science of the machine that does the thinking for, yes, so many millions. The machine cannot feel, but, by and by perhaps—it must be so—science human will become, and from the machine it will turn, because for that it can do no more, and to life and happiness it will devote itself.”

“You believe this,” said Kenneth abruptly.

“I must,” was the quiet answer, “and that is

why when labor mistakes makes, I am not down-cast. They are the mistakes of those who have nothing. It is hard for the worker a change to achieve. His soul is too weary, and since it the error is not of the spirit but of the brain, the world will mend it—and forgive. It is elsewhere that the change must begin; I mean on top. Let them at home commence, and say not that the worker is dirty and perhaps underpaid but ask of themselves—I—am I overpaid for what I do? And if so, why is it? And I tell you, my friend,”—here Sohmer’s eyes flashed—“that the vices of the mechanic are to the rest of the world too interesting. Of the imagination and the eye there are vices worse than those of the hand and body. It is between slime and dirt the difference. Why must you surprised be at a man who after he is forty earns every year less and less, while his brother more and more has collected? Such a man no time has to be clean, and no peace has in which to think. You remember, yes, what Erickson said about having some little left over. So, I have spoken too much.” He broke off, his eyes half-closed, peering intently at visions the young man could not grasp. His expression was exalted.

“No, go on,” said Kenneth with trembling earnestness. He had perceived that mountains were

moved by men like this. "You don't know what it all means to me."

"Is it then more than you saw in the factory?" Sohmer's glance was wistful.

"Yes, and no; I cannot tell. You're putting into words the things I have tried to see. I will always remember, always. And the end of this turmoil will be what? Revolution?"

Sohmer slowly shook his gigantic head. "No, not that; life is too naked and we for each other are too well prepared. It is not what is taken that counts, but that which is given. It must be evolution, in which of men not only the words but also the hearts outspoken are. To-day the world is tired, and our rest not rest is at all, but for another struggle only a preparation. But some day there will come the one thing that the world has not yet tried, and yet waiting it has been for so long."

"And that is?"

"God," breathed Sohmer with thrilling emphasis.

Again silence fell. Kenneth, his very spirit quivering, dared not fasten his eyes on the man beside him. Through the half light the outline of Sohmer reached him, and from the royal face sped a message that sank into his soul. A great hand lifted gently and was laid on his shoulder.

"You will do much, my friend. Youth you have and courage, and I hope, love, if not from one then from another, and to you many doors have been opened."

"But not all?" Kenneth was strangely moved.

"There is still one, the inner door."

"And shall I know it?"

"Above the lintel a mark will be," said Sohmer quietly.

There followed a pause in which Kenneth's heart stood still. Came a quick step on the porch. A moment later Greta entered and, with a glance at her father, held out an envelope to Kenneth. As she did so their eyes met. In her blue orbs was no protest, no distress, but only an unfathomable pride.

"It is for you." Her voice was supremely soft.

The blood rushed to his temples. Presently he looked up, struggling with embarrassment. "I—I'm wanted at Mr. Chambers's house."

Sohmer nodded. "So, it is as you say." He rose ponderously. "You will not forget; you will think of us sometimes, yes? I am glad you came to this house; my wife is glad, and"—with almost imperceptible hesitation—"Greta is glad, too. Is it not so, my daughter?"

Greta turned deadly white. "Yes," she whispered, "I am glad too."

"So you see," smiled the giant, "you did well to come; and now, my friend, before whom so much lies, it is good-by." His massive hands, held out with an impelling dignity, engulfed Kenneth's. "My wife, here, our friend is going. Let him take of this house the good-will."

The little woman came slowly in from the kitchen, wiping her red fingers on her apron. Kenneth was always a mystery to her. He had shot into their midst like a wandering meteor, and now, after wringing Greta's heart, was about to disappear into the far-off country from which he emerged. Jacob had told her of the young man's ambitions. These interested but did not move her so much as the fact that Greta loved him, and would, she felt, always love him. It seemed strange that a man whom Greta loved should want to leave her, and even in their farewell she had a queer impression that this was not after all the ultimate good-by. But she only smiled with kindly directness and, murmuring something about the spare room being unworthy of their boarder, slipped back into the kitchen with a puzzled expression on her small, round face. There, in another moment, Sohmer joined her.

Greta stood motionless, her bosom heaving, the blood leaping to her white throat and temples, then leaving them like marble. For an instant

her lips moved inaudibly, till Kenneth caught a whisper.

“You must go, yes, I know that, but—” she put her hand on her breast—“you cannot go from here. You will always be here. Nothing that can happen will make any difference to that.”

“Greta,” he said miserably, “dear Greta, don’t you understand?”

“It is because I understand,” she insisted gently; “it is you that does not. There is everything in your life, and, while we were together, there was everything in mine. Oh, you may wonder at my telling you I love you so, but when a girl like me loses what to her is most dear, she does not care what she says. If I did not just once speak like this, I would kill myself.”

“You must not say that,” he began. “You know how much I have to thank you for and you are going to be very happy. I am sure of that.”

“Perhaps”—she glanced at him strangely—“perhaps I shall yet be happy. But there is one thing that you must not thank me for and that is my love. I ask you not to do it because of the other girl.”

His soul was wrung in protest and regret. “Do you know what your friendship has meant to me, Greta?” He caught at her hand.

She drew away instinctively. “You must not

say good-by with sorrow," she answered shakily. "You were very good to me, one day." Again her cheeks grew a vivid crimson. "And that I shall not forget. Perhaps"—she smiled sadly—"you will not forget either, and you will not let any one know of my love for, since you do not return it, you cannot speak. So, my best friend, good-by. No, you must not kiss me any more; it is another kiss that I would remember."

He stepped blindly into the hall, and on the porch looked back. Greta was standing pallid and breathless, her blue eyes fastened on him in a long unwinking gaze. Framed in the dingy hallway, her superb figure and marvelous carriage seemed remote from these surroundings. Behind her the outline of Sohmer's great bulk filled the narrow doorway. He, too, was motionless. At his side, reaching hardly to his shoulder, Mrs. Sohmer twisted nervously at her apron, her gaze fixed anxiously on Greta. Kenneth, held for an instant by some mysterious force, paused ere he disappeared. The terrific irony of it all was staggering. Before him lay the world and life and freedom, and a duty for which he yearned. Behind him lay— But at this he choked and stepped swiftly into the street.

As the latch clicked, Sohmer came forward and put his arms round Greta. "It was written, my

daughter," he said gently, "and perhaps my fault it was. The young man wanted a room, and I brought him."

Lifting her eyes, she looked at him steadily. "There is nothing to be sorry for, my father. Did I not say that I was glad he came?"

"Yes, but,"—the giant hesitated, till with an expression of deep tenderness, he bent over and whispered in her ear. Presently he straightened, his features luminous with mystic power. "Yes, that is possible. That it will be so I cannot tell, but here I feel it." He touched his heart.

She stared at him in utter wonder. "But how?" she faltered, her whole body quivering.

"That I cannot say. It has come to me, that is all. And now for the rest of the day we shall into the country go. Eh, little one!" he called to his wife. "We three into the country. But here is Miller. No, there is nothing new?"

Miller, as he spoke, came in with his morning report. All was quiet. Sanders, sulky but inactive, was hanging about the factory and showed no disposition to make trouble. Sohmer's heart lightened at the news, for Sanders was the one whose actions he feared most. This brand might rouse into ferocity the slumbering flame in Erickson and Trufitt, and if that happened he would not answer for the result.

Greta prepared listlessly for their excursion. She was still shaken by her father's whispered consolation, but thought it too extravagant. Ultimately it failed to touch the depths of her nature. Kenneth was gone, and she realized hopelessly that never could she disengage her spiritual existence from the tender growths that encircled him. She had been prodigal and passionate, but far in the innermost core of her now throbbed a new and essential self that hungered for a more delicate food than life could ever provide. By slow and painful stages she had reached the profound conviction that in this one man lay her sanctuary. And this would remain forever.

CHAPTER XXI

SYLVIA thrilled at the sound of Kenneth's voice in the hall. Entering, he halted an instant at the threshold, stared at her almost with incredulity, and, coming swiftly forward, took her without a word in a mighty embrace.

"At last!" he said, "at last! It seems a thousand years since you left."

She put his arms gently aside. Their strength had frightened her. Looking long into his eyes, she decided that he had changed, but in what way it was hard to say. He was stronger, more determined, less merry, more thoughtful. He seemed invested not with the suggestion of age but with the shadow of its gravity. On his lips there was a firmness instead of the old provocative curve. Had Sylvia at that moment been in search of a man, she would have found him, but it was a lover she sought, one with all the extravagances of romance. She had a curious sensation that even while he stooped over her, he was conscious of too many other things as well.

"You 're well," he said, "I can see that; and, Sylvia, you 're a woman."

She laughed with sudden relief. "What did you expect?"

"I don't know, but not just this. I was a bit afraid that the Continent might have put Brunton out of the running."

"Perhaps it has," she ventured daringly; then added swiftly, "But that can wait. Tell me about your father."

Kenneth nodded. "He 's much better and he 's going to get quite well. He knows me now. It 's been a long pull, but he 's rounded the corner."

"I 'm so glad, and,"—she faltered a little—"was that why you were in the factory?"

"Did Mrs. Chambers tell you?" Kenneth's eyes found hers and held them.

"Yes, what you told her, but I want you to tell me yourself very carefully. You—you see," she continued, "I want to understand absolutely, then perhaps I won't feel as I can't help feeling."

Taking her hand between his own calloused palms, he began to talk jerkily but with intense earnestness. It was the tale he had given to Mrs. Chambers, with the difference that now it was told to the one who above all others must accept and act upon it. The picture he drew was vivid and human—but incomplete. There was no Greta in it. Gradually he became aware that though Sylvia listened, it was with her intelligence only and not

her spirit. This disconcerted him and he finished with a jumbled appeal for her support. "It's a life work, dearest," he concluded.

"Here in Brunton?" she said faintly.

Just then there came from Mrs. Chambers, somewhere in the near distance, a discreet remark that lunch was ready. Sylvia got up with a throb of relief and a moment later felt her aunt's questioning eye as she entered the dining-room. Kenneth had wanted to kiss her on the way downstairs, but she laughed him off. He followed, wondering and uncomfortable.

"Your uncle is coming, my dear," said her aunt, "and I want a little chat with him when he arrives. It's about you, young man, and please remember I'm doing my best for you. Has Sylvia approved of your martyrdom?"

Kenneth glanced ruefully at his fiancée. "Not yet, but I have hopes. Perhaps the change from Mentone to Brunton is a little trying."

Sylvia smiled. "Not if it does n't last too long."

His lips twitched. "Won't you please talk about something else, my table manners, for instance. I'm sure you expect something shocking."

The girl glanced at him critically. "You've come through rather well. Was it awful?"

“Why should it be? Your employees do just what you do, only perhaps in a different way, and I felt at home in twenty-four hours. As for Sohmer, one could n’t find a more magnificent man anywhere.”

Mrs. Chambers nodded. “I think I saw him yesterday. Enormous, with a yellow beard that glints in the sun. His head was bent forward and he walked slowly, evidently thinking hard. I was so curious to know what he was thinking about that it made me breathless. Really, Sylvia, you ought to see him.”

But Sylvia expressed no interest. It seemed that she was in prison again and that the last few months had dropped out of sight. At that moment the car deposited Jackson Chambers at the curb and his wife rose hastily. As she went out Sylvia looked up; her lips were trembling, her eyes suspiciously bright.

“Do I and what I have been doing matter so little?” she said unsteadily. “Is the factory and something I don’t know anything about to occupy all our time? Do you quite realize the kind of a welcome you ’ve given me?”

Kenneth sighed. The intense earnestness of Sohmer still enveloped him, and he felt that having plunged into the deep things of life, those affairs which were less profound would, in a way,

settle themselves. He wondered that his own body experienced so little passion and desire. This old but new atmosphere of Sylvia's presence had begun to make him curiously restless. Dainty and desirable, she seemed now almost too fine a thing to touch, but he nevertheless responded instantly to the thought that she was his.

"I know," he said with quick contrition, "you are quite right, dearest, but don't judge me by to-day. All I want to do is to justify myself to you and I don't mind even if that takes a long time. I'm rather afraid of Mr. Chambers and you'll have to help me through. Let's take the car this afternoon and go off by ourselves and you'll see that there are some things I have not forgotten."

The shadow fled from her eyes and she was smiling brilliantly when, after a preliminary cough, Chambers entered, followed by his wife.

"Upon my word!" he said. "This begins to look like a festival. Welcome back to a normal mind, Kenneth." He put a hand on the young man's shoulder. "Here endeth the first lesson, eh! and the last too I hope. Have you scolded him Sylvia, or have you just rebuked him?"

"Neither," she laughed. "I have n't had time."

"If you're wise, Kenneth, you'll never give her time. You two are going to make a most interest-

ing couple—social reformer and cosmopolitan. The result will be worth watching. You 're looking like a Samson. How 's your father?"

"Much better, sir; we can see him to-morrow."

"Good! Does he know you yet?"

"Sometimes—not always. But he 's coming along splendidly."

Chambers nodded. "I 've often thought of him as a man who led a very natural and equable life for years till, much too late, he took up something for which he was n't fitted, and which, after all, was quite unnecessary. He worried over it, and this is the outcome. Don't either of you do that," concluded the lawyer sagely. "We never worry, and look at us."

"Not now?" said Sylvia, involuntarily.

"Not a bit. This affair is only a flash in the pan; Kenneth will agree to that." He paused and winked at her mischievously. "How 's Amaro? That 's the name, is n't it?"

Sylvia, to her own dismay, blushed faintly, and Kenneth looked up. "Who 's Amaro?" he chuckled.

"Dark," said Mrs. Chambers thoughtfully—"dark and dangerous. Single, independent, fascinating to women, man of the world—not our world, thank goodness—an admirer of Sylvia's."

"And, Kenneth, a very good friend," put in the

girl quickly. "I 'm just wondering whether your description,"—here she shot a glance at her aunt—"comes from Mr. or Mrs. Percival."

"It 's a sort of composite photograph, and I 've put in what they left between the lines. It may help Kenneth to realize how lucky he is," added Mrs. Chambers.

"Which reminds me," said her husband absently, "that I 've a bit of news for you all. The factory starts this afternoon with a small crew of outside men, just one department, I think. Pethick's time limit has expired; it was a very reasonable one too, so the wheels are going to turn again and we 'll all breathe more easily. Sylvia, you 've happened back at the crucial instant."

Sylvia beamed. Nothing could have so lightened her heart. Since the moment she first read about the strike, its grim surprise weighed heavily. Then came the discovery that Kenneth had without a word volunteered in an army that to her was forbidding and not to be understood. But little of what he told her that morning had reached her inner self. Instead of caresses and all the tender touches for which she waited, he had, after one rapturous moment, drifted into an argument of a strange problem which he himself in the same instant admitted could not be solved in a lifetime. It had gone hard with her in that hour. She felt

choked, baffled, and hungry for an atmosphere that seemed to have vanished. Kenneth had lost his gallantry and with it his fascination. He was no longer the slim and buoyant lover, but a queer mixture of youth and age on which an unnatural experience had left a depressing mark. Now that the machine was running again, she had a thrill of thankfulness. The old order would reassert itself, and the rest was for her to do. Something drew her eyes to Kenneth's face.

He was leaning forward, staring at Chambers with open astonishment. "This afternoon, you said?"

"That 's it." There was genial amusement in the voice. "And isn't it perfectly natural that those who own a factory should want it to run? Surely, my dear boy, you don't think that your late friends can—" He broke off abruptly at an imperative signal from his wife, gulped at his food and resumed, banteringly. "Moved and carried that no further business discussion be held at this table, to which is a rider that Mr. Pethick—who by the way will be surprised to meet you, Kenneth—will be here in a few minutes and that he and I will be ready to formally reopen the subject. How about it, Sylvia?"

She smiled mechanically. "It 's just right." And after that the meal dragged out to well-meant

but inconsequent attempts at conversation. A chill had fallen over them all.

A little later Sylvia and Kenneth met Pethick and Jackson Chambers in the latter's study. Pethick, whom the lawyer had already advised of Kenneth's identity, was amazingly self-possessed. He greeted Sylvia respectfully and in some indefinite way managed to convey a suggestion of relief at her return. Chambers, noting this, smiled behind his mustache. To Kenneth, the manager merely voiced a polite regret that he had missed the opportunity to have him in the office, but here too was a suggestion intimating that even as it was he had extended the invitation. Sylvia watched these two: one, cool, well balanced, quietly authoritative, emanating system and efficiency; the other—his antithesis—high-pitched, defensive, and palpably suppressing emotion. After a pause Chambers began to talk, outlining briefly the causes of the strike, the present condition of affairs, and touching deftly on Kenneth's position as the future husband of the owner. Sylvia, as she heard him, experienced relief that matters were in such capable hands.

"As to the strike and our decision," he concluded, "we have acted in the best interest of the property as a whole and have as well not been blind to our responsibilities to our employees.

We break with the latter at the point where they try to dictate who shall and shall not work in the factory. That is for us to decide." He turned to Pethick: "Have you started up yet?"

The manager glanced at the clock. "Just about now," he said evenly.

"I'm glad of it. From this time you will, of course, take Mr. Landon into your confidence, as I will, and between us we will try and help him to get things from our perspective and that of the man who built the factory. It may balance up views that he has acquired on the other side of the fence. By the way, Kenneth, do you want to say anything about this matter before we go on?" A quizzical inquiry was in his eyes and he drummed softly on his desk.

Kenneth glanced meaningly at Sylvia, but she shook her head. Then the face of Sohmer seemed to glide in between them, and he looked deliberately at the lawyer. "There is something—in fact a good deal," he faltered, "but I don't know if this is just the—"

"It is," put in Chambers, "just exactly the time and place. We'll be more comfortable if we know where we stand mutually. You agree, Pethick?"

Pethick nodded. "By all means."

Kenneth felt the blood rush to his temples. "Then, to my personal knowledge, the men did not

cause the strike, but—" he blurted—"the management."

There was a petrified silence, into which came Sylvia's uncertain expostulation, "Please, Kenneth, not now."

But his pulse was leaping too hard. "Mr. Pethick asked for it, and he's got it. I know, for I've been there—I've paid to know."

Again there was a pause, at the end of which Chambers, pursing his lips, examined the ceiling with absorbed interest. "Go on, Kenneth," he said presently; "I am sure Mr. Pethick will afford you every license, and we might as well get through with this once and for all. I am sorry, Sylvia, but this young firebrand of yours will feel better when he's had his say."

"Kenneth knows that I don't want him to say anything—at least not now. I have n't been here long enough to know about this, and besides—" her voice trembled and she glanced at Pethick with visible embarrassment.

"Perhaps you are quite right, my dear," answered Chambers quickly. "Look here, Kenneth, you might have a little consideration and let this go over for the present. Mr. Pethick will be ready to take it up with you at any time. What do you say, eh?" He extended a persuasive hand. "Don't break up a friendly meeting. We can't

solve labor problems in half an hour. The thing is to get the factory going, and you can help us there."

That last sentence cleft its way into Kenneth's imagination. "To get the factory going,"—that was it! And when the factory was going what would there be for hundreds of men except to swallow defeat and submit once more to the sway of one now not only implacable but vindictive. If the factory got going, the day was lost, and what chance then for the underdog, what future for the high ambition of his own soul?

"I am sorry," he said grimly, "but I can't help it. I know it 's impossible to put into a few minutes what 's taken nine months to learn, but the hands have n't had fair play. I don't believe they have ever had it since you"—he pointed an accusing finger at Pethick—"since you have been manager. Soon after I went to the factory, I was invited to be a spy and was promised extra wages for doing it. That 's only one thing out of many." He hurried on breathlessly, lest it were already too late. "Mr. Pethick has a lot of schemes for getting bigger results, but he 's left out one thing—ordinary humanity. I 'm not able to argue with you, I know that, but if you 've got one side and I 've got the other, there must be some reasonable ground between." He broke off, adding desper-

ately, "Get Sohmer, ask him to come and tell you what he told me this morning. Get him now."

Chambers grunted. "Upon my word, you 've taken all the license the law allows. Want to talk, Pethick?" he added sardonically.

Pethick was sitting very straight, a patch of color in either sallow cheek. He had made no motion of surprise or annoyance, but his lips curved with a suspicion of contempt. "Is it necessary?" he murmured coolly.

Sylvia had risen and stared at Kenneth, in her face injury and utter amazement. "It is n't necessary at all," she said quickly, "but please feel at liberty to say what you like."

"Thank you. It won't be much. My treatment of the men has not kept the force from trebling in ten years, and my handling of the business can best be seen from the statements. As for detective work, the Government considers it necessary so why not a company, the necessity being the same? I offered John Anderson, without knowing he was Mr. Landon, a place in the office. It seems that he attacks me for doing a thing he has been doing himself."

"What is that?" put in Kenneth hotly.

"Spying!"

Chambers made a curious noise in his throat.

"By George! He got you there."

Sylvia, without a word, vanished into the hall. Kenneth looked after her dumbly, his brain in tumult. "Will you send for Sohmer?" he repeated shakily.

"Eh! What about that, Pethick? It's for you to say."

The manager pressed his thin lips tight. "Sohmer, yes, I don't care. I'll telephone." He stepped to the instrument and spoke to the factory, standing sideways with a curious and baffling smile. "They say they'll send him over."

"Look here, Kenneth," went on Chambers, with kindly emphasis, "we give you all credit for sincerity, even if it is a trifle unmodulated, but just stop a minute and think. You pretend to be a laborer for months, then drop in here at a moment when the whole system of the business is paralyzed and suggest a lot of revolutionary things that can't even be considered now, and, I'll say it because I've every confidence in Mr. Pethick's discretion, you'll either have to get this matter from another angle, or have no relationship with the company whatever. You are well answered when Mr. Pethick points to the progress of the factory as his record, and I can only commend the moderation he's used. The last instructions of Mr. James Percival were that the management was to continue, and his good judgment has been proved."

"I would n't insist that the management be changed if I knew that a new element would be introduced."

"At a time when the men say they won't work and no one else either," snapped Pethick.

"If," said Chambers slowly, "you had allied yourself with us from the start, your words would carry more weight. As it is, you can't blame us if you seem antagonistic."

Kenneth sighed hopelessly. The composure of these men flouted him. They were guarded and secure. Their even and premeditated steps outflanked his every advance, and he saw desperately how vain was the attempt to attack this fortress single handed. The law regarded them with deference, but the very clothes on their backs, and, he reflected, even Sylvia's dainty perfection were the product of a system that horrified him.

Pethick, who was watching keenly, narrowed his gray eyes. "If the men will go back to work, I'm willing to stand by what I offered, but I won't take on the members of the employees' committee." The telephone rang stridently. "There's the office now." He picked up the receiver. "Eh! Sohmer's house closed and the family away. What's that!" His jaw projected and he turned sharply to Chambers. "Some of the strikers have got into the factory and thrown out the

new crew. I'll go over at once. You'd better not come unless I send for you. As for Mr. Landon," he added acidly, "I think he'd be wiser to stay out of it, too. It may interest you to know that he was a member of that committee himself."

CHAPTER XXII

IN the meantime the smoldering tinder had burst into flame.

A squad of police, escorting a group of nervous men to the big factory gates, passed them solemnly between a pair of startled pickets, and marched off, leaving an officer who grinned amiably at the representatives of labor. One of the latter instantly left his post to report. Sanders, loafing in an adjoining street, straightened up as the man approached him.

"They are starting up the mill room. A new gang went in a few minutes ago."

"How many?"

"Six."

Sanders ran round the corner. Already there was a clustering of old hands in excited knots. Windows were thrown open and women called to each other across the walls. The street began to buzz like a hive. He thought rapidly.

"Go on, Mack, and act as if nothing had happened, and don't do anything to draw a crowd. If any one asks for information, don't say anything

more than you can help. I'll be up there presently."

In another moment he was surrounded by a ring of enquirers. Questions, threats, and curses were all audible. Pethick had scored the first trick and the committee's generalship was at fault. What had he to say about it? Did he know that outside help was to be rushed in, and if not why didn't he know?

"Hold on," he burst out angrily, pushing his way through. "You're talking too fast; just wait half an hour. Those scabs are going to cost more than their wages, and if any one is fool enough to want to spoil things he can go up to the factory and start now. If you are willing to wait I'll start it for you." He shook himself free, broke into a run and disappeared.

A few minutes later straggling groups of men moved aimlessly up the street, stopping to talk to others on their doorsteps. No general assembly was apparent, and the street seemed only a little more populated than usual. The groups were noticeable at the upper end, where the road terminated at the big iron gate commanding the entrance to the works. Presently two or three strolled round to the pickets and began bantering the constable. That officer laughed and replied in a kindred spirit.

A striker held out a cigar. "Have one?"

"Don't mind if I do." The constable struck a match and puffed. "Why don't you fellows come back to work?" he said cheerfully, his hands guarding the tiny flame.

The question was never answered. One striker dived at his legs, another at his head, while the third jammed in behind and thrust himself between the iron gates which were just ajar. Simultaneously came a trampling of feet, and the various groups darted up from porch and hall and front garden. Sanders was in the lead. Beside him ran Erickson, his face crimson, a short iron bar in one hand. The big gates swung at their approach and they dashed in. Presently the gates opened again and there ran out the emergency crew, their clothing torn, most without coats and hats. One face was bruised and bloody. The crowd, now increasing rapidly, saw them, and in an instant the air was full of groans and cat-calls. They worked through timidly, trying desperately to touch no man lest they be trampled on. There was something savage in the looks they drew, something more ominous than contempt.

A few minutes later came a clattering at the lower end of the street, and two cars, packed with police, slid up with a strident blowing of horns. Jumping down, the constables shouldered to a lit-

the space that was vacant just outside the gate, and through the bars they could see Sanders, Erickson, and others. A heavy balk of timber had been dropped against the iron frame, its other end buttressed against a rod driven into the pavement. An inspector came forward and demanded admission. High over head sounded a laugh, where some of the strikers were leaning out of the third story window. A silence fell over the crowd just as Pethick, hot with fury, pushed through.

"Open in the name of the law," called the inspector again.

Once more came the laugh, insolent as before, then Sanders' defiant voice, "To hell with the law! Come and open it yourself."

The inspector waved an arm and the constables pushed the crowd steadily back. Two blue-coated men approached the gate. One lifted a long-handled hammer and braced himself to swing. At that moment the brass nozzle of a fire hose was thrust out of a second-story window and a three-inch stream, after swaying uncertainly, steadied on the constable and swept him into a huddled heap. Swerving slowly it bored into the ground at Pethick's feet. In an instant he was overturned, drenched, and hustled into the gutter.

The crowd melted away, rocking with laughter,

and reassembled out of range. The stream slackened and stopped. Pethick, shivering with cold, beckoned to the inspector. "Tell the city to cut the water off this end of the street."

The inspector nodded, but a sympathizer had heard the order and his voice shrilled high. "They 're going to cut off the water, look out."

The heads disappeared from the windows, and, after a few moments, a wisp of smoke trailed out. Simultaneously Pethick heard shouts of "Fire." He gnawed at his lip in desperation. "What had I better do, Chief? They 'll burn the place down."

"If you want to run this show, all right, but if not, why not let me try it?" said the officer sarcastically. "I just want to know what your position is. Are you willing to make terms?"

"No, I 'm not; they 've had my terms for ten days. I expect you to do your duty."

"I know what my duty is and I 'm thinking about the company's property. If you can stand the loss I 'm agreeable, but I won't risk my men unnecessarily. Listen, what 's that?"

From some corner of the works came the dull grinding of metallic teeth and a sharp crack that smoothed out into an irregular rumble. The steady cough of the big engine slowed perceptibly, then ceased altogether. "It 's a mill," said Peth-

ick huskily. "The blackguards have smashed a mill, and they cost two thousand apiece."

In the crowd behind there were startled glances and involuntary steps back. A familiar thing this grim tumult, but always before it had meant death or mutilation. Now it stood for a dire and unbelievable vengeance. There followed a searching of blank windows by thousands of eyes till, just over head, Sanders looked scorefully down. Instantly all noise died away. There were spots of color on his cheeks and his eyes were blazing. Straightening a long arm he pointed at Pethick.

"Do you want to talk now," he called harshly.

There was a turning of faces and undersized men stood on tiptoe to watch the superintendent. It seemed that all things hung upon his answer.

"Come out of the factory and I'll talk to you."

From behind Sanders came a laugh and as he stood aside the huge figure of Erickson was visible. At that the breath of the crowd went out in a vast sigh. The thing was now past all imagination. "Sohmer, is Sohmer there?" boomed the Swede.

A pause followed, lengthened by an apparently universal fear of any discussion with these law breakers. Finally Peters waved a hand. "No," he shouted. "They're all out in the country for the day. Back by six."

Pethick turned to the inspector savagely. "Don't let them talk except to me. Don't let them get any information whatever."

The officer's eyes searched the crowd and he turned sharply to the man nearest him. "Who's Sohmer?"

Miller, for he it was, hesitated a moment. "Sohmer is the chairman of the men's committee."

"Is he in this row?"

"No, he was against it from the start. Best thing you can do is to get hold of him as soon as you can; and, say,"—here Miller edged a little nearer—"look out for the machine shop, will you. There are a lot of fine tools there and—" He broke off flushing, conscious of hundreds of suspicious eyes.

The inspector glanced at him shrewdly and talked earnestly to Pethick. The latter at first thrust out his chin but gradually seemed to be won over.

"Try it if you like. I don't want any more mills smashed."

The inspector nodded and stepped up on the seat of his car. "Any man who is hanging round here in five minutes will be arrested. Go home, all of you," he shouted in a great bull-like voice.

There followed an uncertain pause and a shuf-

fling of feet while the crowd mingled, parted, and ebbed. Moving sullenly and reluctantly down the street, it detached from itself little groups of men who stepped just inside their own gates and waited defiantly. Physically they might be removed, but mind and imagination remained unshifted. In front of the iron entrance was ranged a semi-circle of police.

Dusk fell and the cold light of the electrics rested whitely on the grim walls of the factory. At two upper windows Sanders and Erickson still leaned motionless, peering down from their stronghold at the blue-coated servants of the law they defied. High on the battlements that old James Percival had erected to house their labor, they were for the time masters of all, and the things that had governed and modulated their own lives were hostage in their hands. It was their supreme moment.

CHAPTER XXIII

AS Sohmer's little party neared their house, Miller came up quickly. Behind him they saw a policeman standing stiffly at the gate. The little woman's eyes rounded and she glanced apprehensively at her husband.

"Jacob, what is it? What can he want?"

Sohmer's face was anxious and it became graver as Miller began to talk rapidly. The latter shot out the facts. "They won't talk to any one but you. Come on, the whole show is in your hands."

Mrs. Sohmer paled, grasping the giant's arm. "Jacob, do not go, you will be hurt. You must think of Greta and of me. Of this Sanders I am afraid also."

"These are my people,"—the big man's eyes brightened softly—"and shall I not go? Yes, in one moment." He nodded to the policeman and stepped into his house. Greta and his wife clung to him till his great arms went round them tenderly. Holding them close, his gaze took on an ineffable affection and benignity, while for one poignant instant they stood locked in that mighty embrace. He was their tower and refuge.

“Jacob,” quavered his wife, “do not leave me.” She hid her face against his shoulder.

Slowly Sohmer straightened his huge frame, slowly he lifted his gaze. His hands went out above them as though in supplication. His lips moved, and, murmuring something they could not hear, he kissed them both. Greta said not a word but fixed her whole soul in one long startled look. Suddenly she bent her head and began to tremble. Then Sohmer went out very quietly.

Standing beside the semicircle of police were Pethick, Chambers, and Kenneth. The mob, now under control, resolved itself into wistful groups that spoke breathlessly. Sanders they knew, and Erickson, and all things were possible when these men's blood was up. Kenneth had arrived with Chambers, and the crowd eyed him with grim resentment. He was a traitor, a turncoat who had worked in the factory, made love to Sohmer's daughter, got on the committee, and then played false. To them he was outcast and a marked man.

Sohmer and Miller came through a little lane that formed automatically at their approach. The big man's gaze was as calm as ever, and his massive shoulders held up under the weight of his burden. He towered above them all, his flaxen beard like a soft, yellow flame. Reaching the semicircle he looked quietly at Pethick and Chambers, but

held out his hand to Kenneth. The crowd saw it and marveled. Thus might Christ have saluted Judas.

"Is that you, Sohmer?" called a sharp voice from above.

"Yes, it is." The giant's tones reached without effort.

Through the high and open windows came the sound of running feet. In a little while the ground floor jumped into light. The quadrangle too was illuminated. Erickson had started the dynamo and switched on the electric current. The hose nozzle projected once more.

"Come in alone. We want to talk to you, You other fellows keep away from the gate."

"I understand. I will come."

He advanced calmly. The figure of Erickson moved across the quadrangle and, shifting the beam, admitted him. The beam dropped into place again. Posting guards at the upper windows, Sanders came down with an excited group of strikers.

"Look here," he began hurriedly, "Pethick won't talk to me and I 'm damned if I want to talk to him. Now we 're ready to quit if we get an understanding he won't proceed against us and gives all hands the wages we stuck out for. You 've got to be the go-between and fix it with him."

Sohmer looked round the angry ring. All were armed with hammers, wrenches, and deadly things snatched up from workbench and toolroom. Erickson had seized a prodigious weapon, a steel bar six feet long, which he fingered like a toy. Outside, the semicircle parted again and Pethick came up. Sohmer advanced to the inside of the gate.

"They ask me to tell you," he said through the ironwork, "that they will come out if to make terms you are willing."

"What are the terms?" Pethick's voice was high pitched.

"That you against them will not proceed, and the wages will give that already have been asked." There was a murmur in the crowd beyond, where men turned to each other and nodded. Sohmer stood motionless, poised between capital and labor—tranquil, unafraid, and believed by both.

"I 'm willing to promise not to proceed," rasped Pethick. "As to wages, if the men will sign an agreement that the new scale will stand for five years I 'll consider it."

Sohmer shook his head sadly. "I doubt, but I will tell them." He retreated into the quadrangle.

The strikers, gathered in a corner out of sight of the gate, heard him sullenly. There was one answer they could give, but even in hot blood they

shrank from wrecking the things they had worked with for years. Erickson thought gloomily of his boiler house. A valve opened here, another one closed elsewhere, meant swift devastation, and he concluded that if things had to be smashed it was not in the boiler house. He looked at Sanders dubiously. Sanders had got them into this and now he would have to get them out.

"You tell Pethick," blurted Sanders, "he can either accept our terms or we 'll send the whole place to hell. The only consideration he 'll give an increase in wages is how to jew us out of them the first week. We played your game, Sohmer, till it was n't any good, but now we 've got half a million dollars' worth of property to argue with. Money talks, and I say, let it do the talking for us this time." He glanced savagely about. "If any one wants to get out, now 's the time. Go on, Sohmer; you tell him."

Sohmer looked at him beseechingly. "That is not wise. You trust me, yes I know, but there is another way. Will you not—"

A man dashed out of the nearest building. "A lot more police coming up the street," he shouted. "They 're going to rush the gate."

"All right," snapped Sanders. "Let 'em try. Go on, Sohmer, it 's the last chance."

The giant went slowly back. Pethick heard him

impatiently, and, fortified by the new arrival, and consumed with shame at being so long held at bay, he swore angrily. "I've said my last." Then, touched by the nobility in Sohmer's grave face, "I'm glad you're not in this. Better come outside; there's going to be trouble in a minute."

For a moment the big man stood with the glare of street lights full upon him. Behind the line of police he could see ranks of familiar faces that stared at him as if awed. On the edge of the crowd were his wife and daughter, as near as he could wedge was Kenneth. Catching sight of him, Sohmer beckoned, till the line parted and let the lad through.

"Take my wife and Greta from here away," whispered Sohmer. "These people, they know not what it is they are about to do." The brave, blue eyes turned to Pethick in ultimate appeal. "These my people are, shall I leave them?" For a moment he waited. Then, as Pethick shook his head stubbornly, he wheeled and disappeared into the factory.

There was a stir in the crowd, and a company of firemen pushed through, carrying ladders. These were erected beneath several windows. Instantly the hose nozzle reappeared, but its force, at first tremendous, began to weaken till it dropped to a dribble. At that hammers and wrenches be-

gan to hurtle from above. In the middle of the tumult a man mounted a police motor and hurriedly read something from a small book. A whisper ran through the crowd. It was a magistrate reading the Riot Act. Hardly had he finished when constables climbed the ladders, revolvers in hand. Three were dashed to earth by clumsy projectiles. The crowd swayed with a vast, hoarse sigh that betrayed something savage and primordial.

Presently a constable gained a window. A hand thrust out, but he fired quickly and scrambled in. As he did so every light on that floor was extinguished and there came a crashing of timber. Erickson was barricading the exit.

The struggle grew till the factory seemed full of strange inhabitants and hollow, mysterious noises. Additional constables gained access, and, joining forces, gradually drove the strikers downward. Erickson, seized with a mad berserker fury, stamped down the long isles, smashing and crushing. At every door and passageway there was a fresh stand. The thing was past redemption now. Years of pent up grudge, complaint, and hatred vented themselves in a prodigious orgy. One group set a line of mills in motion and wrecked every machine in deliberate sequence. Sohmer, in spite of his vast strength, was thrust aside and

could only watch the wave of destruction sweep through room after room.

The pressure steadily increased till only the ground floor of one building was unsundered. It too became a maelstrom. Sanders disappeared into the carpenters' shop, where he swept up a pile of shavings. As he darted back a tongue of flame sprang behind him. He caught Erickson by the arm and shouted into his ear. "Come on, we'll go out and finish it. It'll be a damned long time before Pethick turns any work out of this factory."

The remaining strikers clustered round, and a blast of burning air drifted over them. Erickson sniffed and nodded savagely. "Ya, that will be good. Let us finish outside. I had rather fight than roast." He swung his enormous bar. His face, scratched and bloody, was inflamed with passion.

At that Sohmer stepped forward. "It is not so. If you go out now you will be killed. So, wait. I will go and in a little you will follow—one by one. Erickson, Sanders, this you must let me do. For me they will believe."

"That's so." The voice came from the back of the group. "That's right, Erickson; you let him go. I've had enough. We've all had enough, God knows. This means ten years any-

way." A reaction set in and the man began to whimper.

Erickson straightened his great frame and stared. Big as he was, Sohmer overtopped him. There was a pause, in which the eyes of the two crossed like swords. The Swede's glance was like cold fire, but presently it dropped before the majesty of the gaze it met. He sighed profoundly and the great bar slipped clanging to the floor. "Ya," he said unsteadily, "that is best. Eh, Sanders? Sohmer was always right."

The foreman nodded. The ferocity had begun to dwindle in his own breast, and he did not even appear to notice the crashing approach of the attackers from above. Sohmer turned and disappeared and they stared after him through thickening smoke.

Erickson stood motionless. Slowly his eyes rounded and he looked strangely at Sanders. "But if they kill him, what about that?" His head rocked uncertainly. Suddenly he picked up the bar and dashed out. "Come on," he shouted, "we can't stand for that."

Sohmer had stepped quietly into the quadrangle and as the crowd saw him a hush fell. The inspector waved his hand and, while the giant lifted clear the wooden beam that still buttressed the gate, a squad of police moved forward, re-

volvers drawn. Sohmer towered, calm and confident, his yellow beard glinting in the brilliant light. He seemed extraordinarily alone and unmoved by the hoarse roar that rose from the crowd. Kenneth had a glimpse of him, the beam in his arms, and instantly he had a vision of that other lonely figure whose immortal burden was so like this.

The gates swung heavily open. Just as the constables came through, Erickson burst from the factory, followed by a group of coatless men. The great bar swung high over his head. "Come back, Sohmer," he shouted, "come back."

Kenneth, standing transfixed, heard him, and desperately elbowed forward. Sohmer, startled, looked round. The inspector rapped out an order. Still Erickson hurled himself on, behind him the others.

"Fire low," barked the inspector, just as Kenneth broke free.

A ripple of flame spurted along the line. Erickson started and collapsed limply. Two others, toppling over, lay groaning with bullet wounds in their legs. Last of all, Sohmer swayed for an instant, slid slowly to his knees, and lurched to the pavement.

There was a deathlike silence. Presently the crowd bulged forward against the line of police whose straining arms, linked into a living chain,

stretched taut across the road. Mrs. Sohmer fought shrieking with a constable. The uninjured strikers, covered by revolvers, were being handcuffed rapidly. Kenneth and Greta gained Sohmer at the same instant and knelt beside him.

The big man's lids were half closed and a pink froth bubbled at his lips. From his side jets of bright blood spurted with horrible regularity. Greta put her head on his breast. Her own life seemed to be leaving her.

Something of her infinite tenderness reached the dying man, for one great hand was raised and lay helplessly on her hair. Then the white lids lifted and Kenneth looked into Sohmer's eyes.

At what he saw, the heart in his own breast stood still. For one terrific instant there streamed out to him not only the dire mystery of speeding life but another mystery before which his spirit humbled itself to the dust. Benignity was there and a mighty strength and ineffable love, and with all this came a glimpse of something that thrilled and left the watcher dumb. "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"; the last sacrifice made to the uttermost. What did it all mean? *Who* was Sohmer? Slowly a stupendous thought dawned in his reeling brain. The lips moved. Kenneth bared his head and bent close.

“The door is open now,” came a voice, and, with a sigh, the mild eyes closed.

A swinging arc light cast a sharp shadow across the prostrate form. Dumb with grief, Kenneth stared up. It was Pethick, beside him Chambers, his face working with pity. The manager said not a word, but his hard glance spoke for him.

“Well,” it demanded, “are you satisfied?”

CHAPTER XXIV

IN the little sitting-room lay Sohmer, touched by death into a new dignity. On his lips still lingered the shadow of a smile. His forehead, harbinger of so many tender attributes, was like marble, and across his breast the great, yellow beard streamed like dull gold. Mortality had smoothed every line from his features, and they appeared as though chiseled to some Olympian mold whose rigid calm was of nameless import.

Beside him, hour after hour, sat Greta, and to her throbbing spirit it seemed that multitudes came with a murmur of sympathy and passed on into a world that for her had ceased to exist. Repeatedly her mother stole in, pressed her slack shoulder, stooped over the still form, and slipped back to the kitchen, strangled with sobs. But Greta found not the surcease of tears. Something in her brain refused to work. Again she saw her father, his hands outstretched, and again there pulsed the unnameable thrill of his benediction. From this he had moved calmly on to death. With her cheek against the stiff fingers, she asserted desperately that he was not dead, till the majesty of his face crushed her revolt. He knew—he al-

ways had known. She realized it now and quivered with the thought that her flesh and blood were one with his.

It was nothing to her that the strike was over, that Sanders, Erickson, and the rest, whose wounds were not serious, had already been released from jail, and that the remnants of the men's committee had compromised with Pethick, for all this had sprung from the sacrifice. To-morrow, after the funeral, the factory would recommence its monotonous grind, and the recurrent cycle once more dominate the lives of thousands. Against this she would have voiced no protest had either Sohmer or Kenneth remained, but now she felt only a wound that would never heal, its ache stimulated unendingly by a spiritual hunger that would never be appeased.

Presently her mother came in, treading with painful quietness. "Some one there is who would see you."

"I don't want to see any one." Greta's voice was weary.

"But this lady"—the little woman hesitated with just a touch of awe—"is Miss Percival."

Greta flushed dully and wondered that she could feel even this. "Then I will see her here."

Her mother disappeared, choking. There was a sound at the door and Greta looked up. Her heart

was beating with thin, rapid pulsations, and the pallor of her cheeks set forth a vitality that now seemed insensible even to grief. She did not move, but a slow flame dawned in her wide, blue eyes. From the dead man she almost felt a signal that he, too, knew who was here.

"Is this Greta?" The voice was low and tremulous.

"Yes, I am Greta."

"And," ventured the other, "I am Sylvia Percival."

"I know that." The tones were listless. "Why have you come here?"

Sylvia shrank a little. "To tell you how sorry I am."

Greta's fingers curved over her father's wrist. "There is nothing else? No!"

"Oh, believe me, I feel more than I can say." Sylvia moved a step closer.

"So. It has always been like that with me. It does not matter; nothing matters now. Is there nothing else?"

Sylvia remembered that she was James Percival's daughter. "I want to do what I can," she said steadily. "I am trying to tell you that, and I will see that you are taken care of, and your mother." Her eyes wandered to the still form. "How—how splendid his face is."

"Your factory kills my father and you take away my man and you will take care of me," answered Greta wonderingly. "No, I do not understand."

Sylvia recoiled before the accusation of that gaze. "Your father's death was—a dreadful accident," she stammered. "And I—no, I have not come to take your man. What do you mean?"

"Yes—you will marry him," said Greta slowly, "but that will not change it. Always from the first I loved him, even when he told me he loved you. I am not like you and I have nothing, but my love is stronger because I feel nothing but love. There is a little part of his life that I have, not even a year it is, but it is mine and I will never forget, and all your money cannot buy it back. And yet you say that you want to take care of me. That is why I do not understand." Her cheeks grew hot. She was animated by a superb resentment.

"Does Mr. Landon then love you?" Sylvia marveled at her own voice.

"No, but only because he was promised to you. He was very good to me, so good that you will never know." She stared at her father. "Something has been taken away, and, yes, something given—if only for a few months. You did both of these things but you did not know. You are sorry

now—yes, I believe that—but only for a little while. By and by perhaps you will forget, but how can I forget?”

“Please,” said Sylvia faintly, “you are telling me things I never dreamed of.” She went on with a strange feeling that this chasm must be bridged somehow, even in Sohmer’s presence. “I never knew Mr. Landon lived here. Did he—did he make love to you?” Her soul revolted at her own words.

“So clear it is that you do not understand,” Greta answered wearily. “Love is not made, it makes itself. I thank you, but help I do not want. It is the same with my mother.”

There followed an instant, the last of all, in which, abandoning herself to pity, Sylvia might have knocked at the girl’s heart and been admitted. Had she in that irrevocable moment been capable of a royal emotion, and, careless of all else, sought what she might bestow and not what she might preserve, these two would have arrived at some strange unity. But now the consciousness that Greta loved Kenneth with all the strength of her quivering soul, obliterated for a period these grim surroundings and the merciful purpose of her visit. She was sorry for Greta, doubly sorry, but there was something repellent in the vision of Kenneth living here month after month, wor-

shipped by one who in type and passionate power was unlike any woman she had ever seen. There gnawed in her brain the cankerous thought that there may have been that of which she would never know. The obvious closeness, the intimacy, the bodily contact induced by these constricted walls, filled her with a physical revolt that even the still face of Sohmer could not quell. And if the Sohmers family was, as Kenneth had assured her, the best of all, what of the rest? These were the people to whom he expected her to devote her life.

"Greta," she said slowly, "I can only tell you again how sorry I am for what has happened and that I want to help as much as you will let me. I don't understand why Mr. Landon came here to live, and," she added under her breath, "I don't mean to ask. We won't see much of each other after this, but perhaps by and by you won't hold me so much to blame as I am afraid you do now. I have arranged"—she hesitated and colored, "that you will hear from me every month."

Greta's lids narrowed as a slim, neatly gloved hand went out to her. "The factory, yes, it is yours, and are you not to blame? The clothes on your back, my father helped to earn them for you, and here is my father. As to the other, I will not

speak any more. It is too much. Please go away." Her voice lifted imperiously.

Percival's daughter departed with a sigh, in which compassion and suspicion were strangely blended. This visit, a self-imposed burden in which both Chambers and his wife wanted to accompany her, was something less than fruitless. She had embarked on it with a new sense of duty. It would be trying, but to go through with it would evidence her vital interest in the humanities of her position. Now she carried away only a fading impression of Sohmer's marble features, the vision of a flaxen-haired girl who sat beside the dead man with unfathomable and resentful eyes, and a disturbing picture of Kenneth, cabined in those narrow walls with a woman who gloried in the fact that she loved him. It was all grim and sordid, and clung to her with inexplicable suggestions of closely pressed bodies that sought each other for warmth and comfort.

Sylvia had not as yet yielded to any comparison of Kenneth with Amaro, but at last she asked what would be the view of the latter in such a case. He would, she decided, only shrug his shoulders and announce with a laugh that she must be careful not to invest where there might not be a satisfactory return, that if Monsieur Landon had not desired to stay with the Sohmers he need not

have done so, and as for such things as strikes and death, he hoped the good God would some time provide a world where they did not exist, but so far He had not provided it. With this in her mind, she returned to the Chambers' house, where Kenneth awaited her.

Twice that day, Kenneth had asked to see Greta, but Mrs. Sohmer had only shaken her head. He had passed Erickson and Sanders each time, but they stared at him with a silent contempt that was worse than a blow. He was safe, every one was now safe, so far as they were concerned. The thing was to get Sohmer buried, and accept the four per cent. that Pethick offered and start back at work. Later on, if the cost of living got any higher, they would strike again, and some one else get killed, after which might come another four per cent.; but for the rest of it they would be more careful who they put on their committee. Just now the papers were full of the tragedy of the day before, but the accounts seemed to miss the heart and cause of it all. Soon it would be forgotten. As to themselves, Erickson and Sanders felt somewhat differently. They had had their hour and were marked by their fellows as the men who held the fort and defied the power of law and property.

The management, wise to the psychology of the

event, seized its opportunity. Pethick had said so little that there was nothing to retract, and this left him in a position in which, after a well-considered wavering, he had doubled his previous offer. Contracts were getting behind, and his keen brain already picked out places in which he could retrieve fractions of this concession. Chambers, too, had put the affair to his wife much as the world saw it. Of late he had often spiritually rebelled against the duties laid upon him, but, trained in a rigid school, he always ended by shrugging his shoulders and seeing, as he put it, the rotten thing through. It could not have been prevented, he argued, unless one were content to throw business judgment overboard. It was impossible from the start that the strikers could win; there was n't a factory owner in the country who could afford to see them win. Wise people stayed inside the law no matter how lop-sided it might be, and others did n't. Thus he went on record.

So it came that the wheels were about to turn again, not by virtue of any real readjustment or reconciliation, but because fear and uncertainty joined hands with necessity and, as before, plodded along the trail cut by authority and self-interest. This was the real tragedy of the strike.

At the Chambers house Kenneth waited, tense with emotion. The depth of his soul had been

sounded, and he felt that Sylvia, not less moved, would answer to the call. As she entered he rose and went forward with arms outstretched. She evaded his caress.

"Sylvia," he asked hastily, "what is the matter? You saw the Sohmers?"

"Yes." Her eyes were unnaturally bright.

"And you told them what you were going to do?"

"Yes, but they refused to take anything."

"Why? I don't understand."

"Perhaps not, but I think I do." Sylvia's lips began to tremble. "You did not tell me about Greta—ever. Was it fair?"

"Would it have been fair to Greta?" he said slowly. "Don't you trust me, Sylvia?"

But Sylvia had begun to wonder whom to trust. It seemed that the only unchangeable elements were Chambers and Pethick. She had seen the factory in the possession of a mob, the factory which under the cold hand of her father was so unprotesting and immutable. She had been prodigiously shocked and frightened when this giant mechanism got out of gear and its occupants were transformed into furious engines of destruction. It was no longer a factory but a volcano. For the moment she put Greta deliberately out of her mind and wondered if Kenneth actually wanted

to manage the works in some new fashion known only to himself. She tried to imagine those forbidding walls without Pethick.

"Yes, I trust you, Kenneth, but perhaps I don't agree. I had a long talk with Mr. Chambers last night and he told me much about this business that I did not know before. He reminded me, too, of my father's wishes about Mr. Pethick."

"But the world has changed since then," he interposed eagerly. "We know more and we feel more. I only want you to let me help you shoulder a big job."

"What is that?" she said curiously.

"Sohmer always spoke of the factory hands as his people—they are yours, too."

"And the job?" she persisted.

"Is to help them out."

Sylvia moved restlessly. "The people who said they would neither work in the factory, nor let any one else work?"

"Yes, just those people," he answered earnestly.

She stared at him. He was obviously devoid of that sense of property which now occupied its own corner in her mind. It would be a matter of indifference to him what became of property, so long as he lived up to certain altruistic precepts the wisdom of which was flouted by the events of

the last few hours. She began to see herself as mistress of a home to which he contributed nothing but a stern sense of duty and an uncomfortable continuity of purpose. She wondered now if he did not think her desirable only because through her he could best realize his impossible ambitions. Where, she reflected, did she herself come in? Could he rouse and experience rapture? Had light, air, and motion no invitation for him? Was his own world so close that the outside world held nothing? Was he so earnest as to be narrow, so conscientious as to be selfish? He aspired to stand between capital and labor and play fair with both, but this contemplation brought her a nameless anxiety and visions of bickerings and tumult.

"I'm afraid that I'm not a social reformer, Kenneth," she said shakily. "I don't understand these things, and must leave them to others. You want me to do something, but I'm not the sort of person who can do it."

"We can do anything together," he said quickly. "It is only necessary for us to feel it, I've learned that."

"But that's just it," she persisted with the stubbornness of all weak souls.

He moved close to her. "Don't worry, Sylvia; it's all right; we'll work the thing out between

us." He gazed into her face, fired with great thoughts.

Her hands lay slack, and presently she looked up, almost with wonder. "Here, in Brunton?"

"Why not, dearest? We're going to be very happy. And it has n't been easy since you went away. Can't you see?"

But a shadow crept over Sylvia's brain, and she saw again the red lips and flaxen hair of a girl who spoke strange things while her eyes burned. She saw the calm features of Sohmer, but she heard too the clatter of Amaro's ponies swinging down the Corniche Road, the lisp of a fretted sea against its curving shore and Amaro's own voice as he warned her lest the factory swamp her altogether. What did Kenneth know of such scenes as these, what indeed did he care to know?

"I cannot feel it as you do," she said faintly.

A silence ensued, and in it there died the last spark of a love that for them both had once been a thing of beauty and promise. Kenneth questioned his soul to discover whether indeed it had been love. Staring mutely, he saw Sylvia suddenly stripped of the glamor of care-free days that would never return, her very daintiness achieved at a price—a price of which he knew. She was like a flower which, nourished by some opulent

grime in a hidden darkness, stretched its petals to the sun all oblivious of the sentient gloom beneath. Beautiful but timorous, impulsive but without depth, her slim body encompassed no power of passion, no constancy of purpose. She was what her father and her fate had made her.

Even while this revelation dawned, Kenneth heard, as from a distance, the murmur of a restless ocean, the somber voices of millions of men who, as the cycle of time grew nearer to maturity, might upset the world and "rebuild it nearer to their hearts' desire." Beneath the polished surface of society moved an inchoate mass, divided for the time by its very intensity, but drawing inevitably nearer to some stupendous climax. Skimming this surface he saw Sylvia, and all like Sylvia, indifferent through ignorance to the prophetic ripples that stirred it; unaware of the maelstrom slowly taking place within its depths. Sohmer was dead. The thought that most angered was the futility of that courage, the grim reward of that sacrificial soul. But behind Sohmer's body stood Erickson and Sanders, and millions of others. There was borne to him the sound of vast and ominous breathing, and after that flashed back Sohmer's words: "A well of water you will find in what you think is a wilderness." Last of all came the vision of Greta.

Sylvia spoke again. "I'm afraid, Kenneth, that we've both made a mistake and perhaps didn't know each other well enough. It's impossible for me to live as you propose, and so—" she broke off in confusion.

"Then we'd better part," he put in bitterly; "is that it?"

She nodded, her eyes wide and fearful. But a breath of freedom had reached her and she gathered courage. "Anything else would not be wise, for either of us. Don't you see that?"

"I don't know," he said grimly. "I see so much."

"That's just it," she hastened; "perhaps I don't feel enough, but I can't help it."

Kenneth sprang up. A new voice had begun to sound in his ears, and in his heart there was throbbing a clamorous reply. "I have tried," he said gently, "to put the thing as I see it—as I know it is. Perhaps it is my fault that it does not reach you, Sylvia. I somehow think that you don't want it to. But some day"—his tones hardened—"it may reach you in spite of yourself, and if it does it will make you feel." He held out his hand.

She stared at it mutely. It was marked with toil, a strong hand, bearing honorable scars. She did not guess that it was the hand of labor, ex-

tended ere labor itself withdrew to a region where it would renew the uncouth protests that had so terrified her. For an instant she poised on the edge of remorse, waiting lest some unexpected surge of feeling might overwhelm her spirit. But instead of this, there drifted in the fragrance of violets and a whisper of the south wind as it loitered across from the hills of Corsica.

"I am sorry, Kenneth," she said faintly.

He whitened with intolerable scorn and went out without a word. On the street he turned automatically, half running, half stumbling, eastward. His eyes were blazing. The voice in his heart had become louder and he hastened to answer. Blinding truth was unveiled within him, and he had cut his very soul free. It was now bleeding, and pulsed madly for its one salvation.

Nearing the factory he hurried past Sanders, who stared and followed him with an insolent gaze. Approaching the Sohmer house, he saw others to whom he was outcast, but what did that matter now? At the Sohmer door he halted, the blood singing in his ears. With a long breath he opened and went in.

Greta started, the color flying to her white cheeks, her lips quivering. "Please—please—you must not come here. Please go away! I—I"—she laid her hand on her tumultuous breast.

"Greta," he whispered, "I want never to go away!"

Her parted lips emitted a strange sound in which wonder and incredulity were pathetically blended. "I do not understand. It is not much that I can understand to-day."

"Greta," he answered passionately, "I have come to tell you, yes, here. I tell you that it is you and only you. I love you. I see now that I have loved you for a long time. I want to take care of you, Greta." He put his arms round her trembling shoulders. "Do you understand at last?"

Once again in the breathless moments that followed there winged from Sohmer a message. It penetrated into Greta's spirit till she palpitated with an amazing memory. The whisper he had left with her leaped back with mystic power and meaning. She humbled herself before it, then raised to Kenneth a face luminous with unutterable longing.

"You," she breathed, "it is true you love me? Here, beside my father, you tell me?"

"To the end of the world, I love you," he answered gently.

CHAPTER XXV

AN hour before Sohmer's funeral, Kenneth went by appointment to Miller's house, where, to his surprise, he found not only the master mechanic but also Sanders, Erickson, Peters, and Trufitt. As he entered they rose and, one after the other, shook hands with him very formally. This ceremony, impressive in its silence, being concluded, Miller, clearing his throat, spoke with palpable difficulty.

"We 've asked you here, Mr.—Mr. Landon," he stumbled a little over the name, "to put ourselves right with you, and I say it for all when I say that we 're very much in earnest."

Kenneth's heart leaped. "You need n't do anything like that."

"We know what we mean," went on the mechanic determinedly, "and we know what we 've felt. We feel differently now, and it 's only right to say so. I guess I 'll have to go back a little to where Sohmer put you on the committee. We took his word for it, as we did for everything else, but some of us were n't very comfortable. I don't mind saying that now. One thing led up to an-

other, till I saw you myself talking to a lady who I was told was the wife of the company's lawyer, and that was after the strike was on. So we reckoned we were all in wrong so far as you were concerned."

"Ya," put in Erickson, with a sudden gleam in his eyes, "that night I walked behind you for two blocks. It was dark too." He shrugged his great shoulders.

"That 's done with," resumed Miller's even voice. "Anyway, just before the row actually started you disappeared. Sohmer would n't say where you were; in fact he would n't say anything at all, except that he believed in you. Then you turned up at the factory with the company's lawyer and that finished it for us. Eh, you fellows, is n't that about it?"

The others nodded, all except Sanders who sat motionless, his burning eyes fixed on Kenneth.

"I don't wonder you felt what you did," said the latter slowly. "Appearances were all against me, but I could n't help them."

"Now we know you could n't," jerked out Peters, "and since you are marrying Sohmer's daughter, and have kicked the boards off the fence and climbed through, why you 're one of us, that is, if you want to be. That 's what we 've got you here to tell you."

"And tell you so damn straight," volunteered Truffitt, "that there 'll be no mistake about it."

"Of course," concluded Miller with a touch of dignity, "I don't know if all this makes any difference, but it 's coming to you anyway." He scanned the faces of the others as though demanding to know whether he had spoken their minds, and sat down abruptly.

Kenneth flushed. "Believe me, there 's nothing that means so much. Perhaps I 'll be able to make it clearer another time, but I 'd sooner hear what you 've told me than anything in the world, and," he added earnestly, "I need it." He looked into these strong souls, thrilling at the thought that between them the bars were down forever.

"Well," said Miller, rising, "there 'll be lots to talk over. I don't suppose you 'll work here now and we 're not anxious to, either. It 's a long furrow, but we 're not finished, and if you want to take hold, too, why we 're glad to have you. See you at the funeral." He extended his hand. The others, following, did the same and filed out, all except Sanders. He, too, had risen, but stood leaning slightly forward, the flames still moving in his dark eyes.

"I 've got something to say—about Greta." His voice was ragged with emotion. "You 're going to marry her—that 's sure?"

"Yes," said Kenneth curiously, "absolutely sure."

"Why?" blurted Sanders, the blood flying to his temples.

Kenneth drew a long breath. "Because I love her."

"No other reason?" There was a lift in the voice.

"What other could there be—isn't that enough?" Kenneth stared.

Sanders bent on him a piercing gaze into which the man flung his very soul, till slowly the grim lines relaxed about his mouth and his eyes became clouded with a new conviction. After a moment he slid into a chair, flung his arms on the table, and thrust his face between them.

"By God!" he said brokenly.

Kenneth stooped over him. "I know, Sanders. I'm sorry for you, believe that."

The foreman lifted his haggard features. "It's all right. I reckoned it'd have to come, but I thought perhaps you had to marry her; more than one told me that."

A blinding light flooded Kenneth's brain. "There's only one reason," he half whispered. "We love each other."

Sanders caught his breath. "Before God?"

"Yes."

Silence followed in which there dawned in Sanders's face the semblance of a man who had been through deep water.

"I accept that," he answered simply; and, after a poignant pause, "she always wanted something different from me; I saw it from the first. I can't explain, but the more I tried to get ahead the more different I became from what she liked. I guess I frightened her. That's my damn temper, and when I got rough she got quiet and I didn't understand. God Almighty made you just what she wanted and I couldn't change over. But," he concluded bravely, "that's all done with now and I wish you luck. And, say, there's one thing more."

"Yes," ventured Kenneth, full of wonder.

"You remember that day I ran into you two out in the country?"

"I do."

"Well," stammered Sanders, "I'm as sorry as hell about what I said to you." And with that he darted out of the room.

There followed Sohmer's funeral, a pathetic spectacle. His own people guarded him jealously as though this were something they and no others must do for him. Pethick was there and Chambers, the latter fixing his eye on Kenneth in evident invitation. But in spite of the obvious de-

sire of the company to appear humanely sympathetic, a gulf yawned between its representatives and the hundreds of grim-faced people who thronged about Sohmer's grave. Labor in the mass had seized the opportunity to pay tribute. Already strange stories were being told about the dead giant, stories that left both narrators and listeners wondering what manner of man it was who had moved so quietly amongst them. It seemed that Sohmer being dead would radiate a greater power than Sohmer living. In this hour labor and not capital appeared the conqueror.

Greta and Kenneth were married a day or two afterwards, the ceremony being witnessed only by Greta's mother, Miller, and Trufitt. Mrs. Sohmer watched, blinking, her red fingers locking nervously, her round cheeks streaked with wet channels, down which the tears coursed unheeded. To the little woman that was all part of Jacob's plan. He had known that Kenneth was coming back or he would not have allowed himself to be killed, and what was more natural than that Greta should marry the man she loved and marry him quickly before more hurt befell her? So, at Miller's congratulations she expressed no emotion, no surprise, but only a curious resignation suggesting somehow that her own part was yet to be played.

To Kenneth's emotion Greta opposed a calm that was inexpressibly tender. It was born of the consciousness that the dear aspiration of her own soul had not been unfounded. Always now she would listen to its promptings with courage and peace; and that essential self which in past years had troubled and tortured her would forever be her guide and comfort. She was at last kindred with the invisible.

After the ceremony she was in a strange spiritual exaltation. This was stirred but not broken when Kenneth brought in a letter that he had just received from Bertha Chambers.

"Read it," he said caressingly, "the check is good, but what she says is better."

Greta read and a wave of thankfulness came over her. Bertha Chambers with a curious realization that Kenneth, of them all, had had the vision and was following it, had posted an impulsive note. In it she told him to count her always as his friend and Greta's as well. She admired him for his courage, and though there were things about it all that she did n't understand, she felt nevertheless that he was doing what he was somehow meant to do. "You're a brave and splendid boy," she concluded. She had sent this off with an unwonted sensation that at the age of fifty she was suddenly awakened to the world at

large, and it was Kenneth who had awakened her.

Greta's eyes sparkled. "It 's beautiful. Come, we 'll show it to mother!"

Mrs. Sohmer, in her bedroom, looked up as they entered. She was standing beside an open trunk, in her hand a photograph of Jacob and herself, taken on the day of their own wedding. The bureau drawer stood open and a neat pile lay on the bed. Beside these were some of Sohmer's clothes, at the sight of which tears sprang to Greta's eyes.

"Mother, what are you doing—what is this for?"

"I go away," said the little woman wearily.

"But no. Why do you speak so?"

"Yes, much have I thought about it. To my brother in Stockholm I am going. Him have I not seen for twenty years, but with us that no difference makes. It is most wise and he will be glad. Now I begin to pack, but it is a hurt to put so few things in my trunk."

"No, no, do not say this," protested Greta; "you must always live with us. It will break my heart to see you go."

But Mrs. Sohmer only mopped her eyes and shook her head on which the brown hair was plastered rigidly down. "As to what may come I cannot tell; I am not like Jacob, your father,"—here

her words trembled—"but I do not see that you will live here very long. That does not matter for you have your man. But my man is dead, so I go away. It is best, so do not me persuade, for there is here too much that speaks of him."

And to all they could say she was adamant. Kenneth, protesting in vain, finally perceived in this woman a delicacy he had never imagined. In some elusive way she had grasped the fact that while to Greta all things were possible, she had lived her own life and could never change. She would yield to no new influences, and therefore would find nothing to assuage the memories that these young people must inevitably revive. Her resolution was so simple, so pathetic, and transparent that it permitted no denial. She too was following her soul.

"You will be going away for a day or two," she continued gently, "and till you come back I shall wait, but to see your father, Kenneth, I will not go. Greta he will understand, but of me he would think things that would not help. It is better so. When you see him you will say that Greta not without dowry is." She picked up a thumbed and leather-bound book. "In the bank is her money, the savings of my man for twenty years. It made us so happy," she added brokenly, "every time we put in a little sum, how little it did not matter. It is

now more than three thousand dollars and I will not touch it, I have enough. About this, Kenneth, you did not know. I am glad."

Again Kenneth was silent. There was something holy about Sohmer's savings, so holy that there was only one way in which to use them. Behind them stretched a vista of brave and patient years. He tried to say something about it.

But the little woman only shook her head. "With this I have nothing to do; Greta's it is and yours. These clothes of my man I will give away, but to find one—who can wear them—will be hard. Now you will take Greta to see your father." And with this she turned blindly to her work.

The girl's mind was already fixed, palpitating, on the future. Had her father not been killed, Kenneth would not now be her husband. This throbbed in her brain, mingling with the consciousness that she was about to be tried in a balance of which she knew nothing. Once she had gone by herself to Cottingham, walked to the Landon house, and peered through the iron gates at the blank windows and overgrown garden paths. It was fine and imposing, and it gave her a breathless sensation to realize that Kenneth had lived there. Then, too, she had conjured up pictures of Kenneth's father that somehow frightened her. Her heart fluttered uncertainly, and though Ken-

neth comforted her it was not with sufficient assurance to calm his own doubts. He recognized that however else Henry Landon had failed, it was not in being an aristocrat.

"And if he does not like me," said Greta timidly, "if he is angry with you?"

"He will love you, dearest, he can't help it."

"But I am not like"—she faltered and stammered; "I am Jacob Sohmer's daughter."

"And that is just why he must love you," said Kenneth tenderly.

"But have you thought what we should do if he does not?" she persisted. "Did I do very wrong to let you marry me, Kenneth? I wanted you so very much in my heart, but if—if it is going to make you unhappy with your father, I shall go away."

He caught her to him passionately. "You must not talk like that, Greta. I love you with all my soul."

"You love me, yes," she said gently, "and I, how I love you! Many years it will take to show how much. But if I go into a new country, shall I be able to live there and not make you, perhaps, a little ashamed for me. And the people who are already there, will they look at me and say, 'Where did she come from?' This perhaps is foolish to you, but it would not sound foolish to

any woman." She nestled closely and he could feel the throbbing of her breast.

"Greta," he answered unsteadily, "your country is my country now, and love is there. Does anything else matter? Come! we will go." But all the while on the journey to Cottingham she kept his hand, patting it silently in the dusk, assuring herself of his presence in every wistful way.

At the door of the nursing home she clung to him. "Let me wait, Kenneth. You will tell him first and then perhaps you will come for me." Her lips, dewy and trembling, lifted to his own.

He went quickly upstairs, his pulse knocking hard. Suddenly he decided that not all the story would be told to-day. Entering the sickroom he saw that the bed had been moved close to a window that overlooked a garden in which green things were unfolding delicately. The gaunt figure was leaning back in a pile of pillows. The nurse got up and came quickly across.

"He's not quite so conscious to-day," she said. "There's no relapse of any kind, but at some times the improvement is more evident than at others, and he's really getting on extremely well. He wanted you very much yesterday."

"I could n't come yesterday," said Kenneth under his breath. "Won't he know me now?"

"I think he'll feel that you're here without

knowing you. You can speak to him; that won't do any harm, but don't try to rouse him."

"Dad," said Kenneth softly.

A ghost of a smile drifted across the pale face, after which came a jumble of something indistinguishable. This in the next moment trailed out into snatches of old forgotten things, while the tired eyes opened weakly on the green of the garden. Henry Landon's spirit had retraced the years and was walking in another garden with the woman he loved. Tender and half remembered phrases slipped from his lips, with endearments and caressing fragments. The thin hand went out, fumbling, till it captured phantom and vanished fingers and covered them with kisses. He babbled on, uncovering the very springs of his former life, while Kenneth stood and his tears started hotly.

The nurse laid a cool touch on the lean wrist. "He 's been like this a good deal to-day. There 's nothing to be anxious about, but it would be a help if he slept. He does n't seem to want to, and the doctor says it must come naturally. Perhaps you can suggest something soothing, your voice ought to reach him."

There followed an instant of silence in which he heard a step in the hall outside. On the threshold stood Greta.

"I could not wait," she said timidly; "did I do wrong?"

"No, it 's quite all right, but my father does n't know me to-day. He 's restless and ought to sleep, but can't."

"May I go close," she questioned breathlessly, "quite close?"

"My wife," put in Kenneth. He thrilled at the word.

The nurse nodded, and, with a curious glance, stepped quietly out. Greta seemed not to have seen her. She was standing beside Henry Landon. His prematurely whitened hair and the waxen pallor of his features transformed him into something fragile and patriarchal. The corners of his lips were still curved into a faint smile.

Then with a sigh of infinite pity she stretched out her round, young arms and took that weary head to her breast. Into the stricken man she poured the divine benediction of her pure and pulsing body, while, her eyes suffused with tenderness, she crooned over his wasted frame like a mother over her babe. Folded in her embrace, Landon lifted his blank gaze in impotent wonder, till, as the superb ichor of this solace enveloped him, there yielded alike his spirit and his flesh. Curtains of drowsiness dropped around him. His form slowly relaxing nestled closer in the en-

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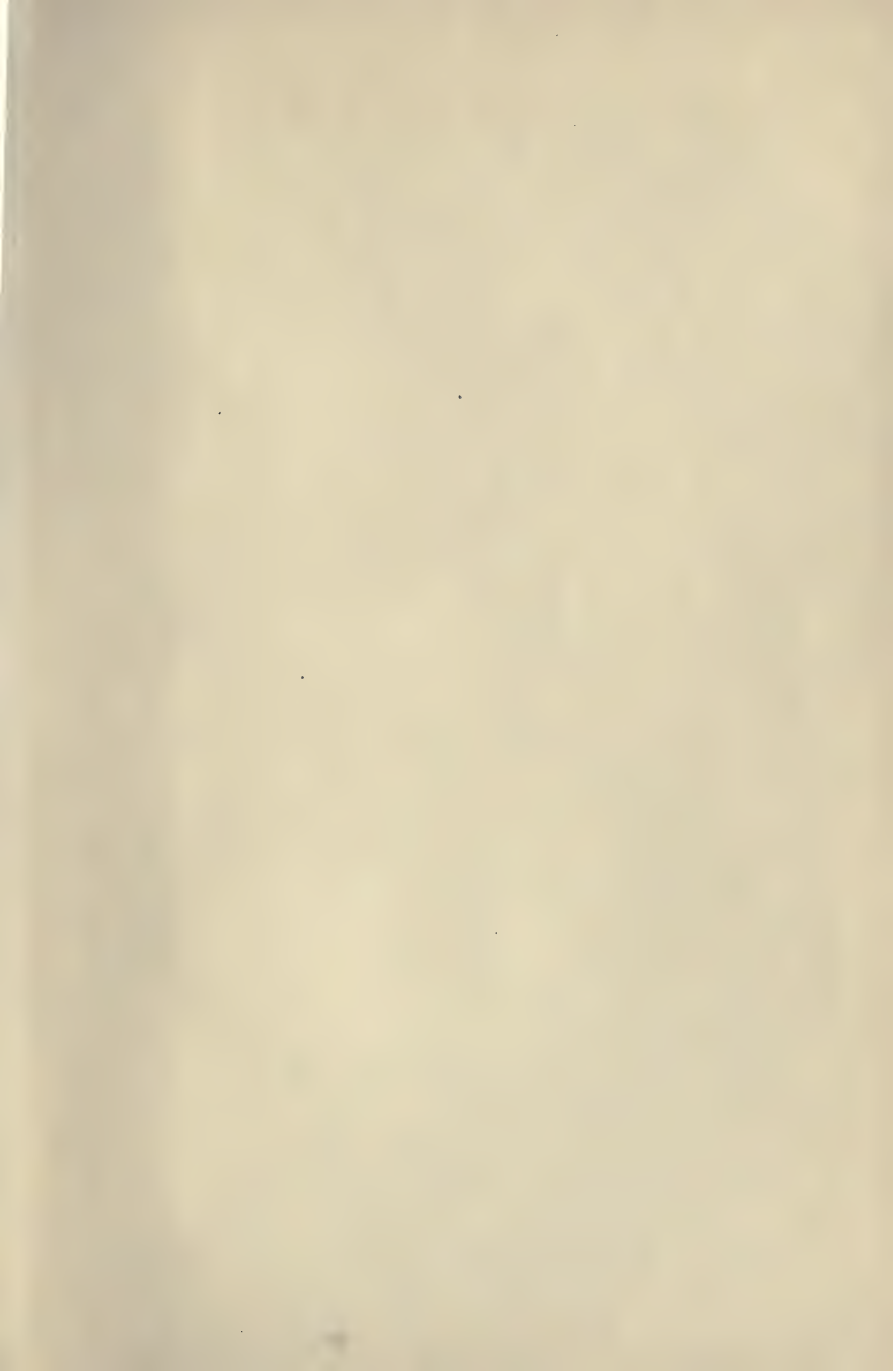
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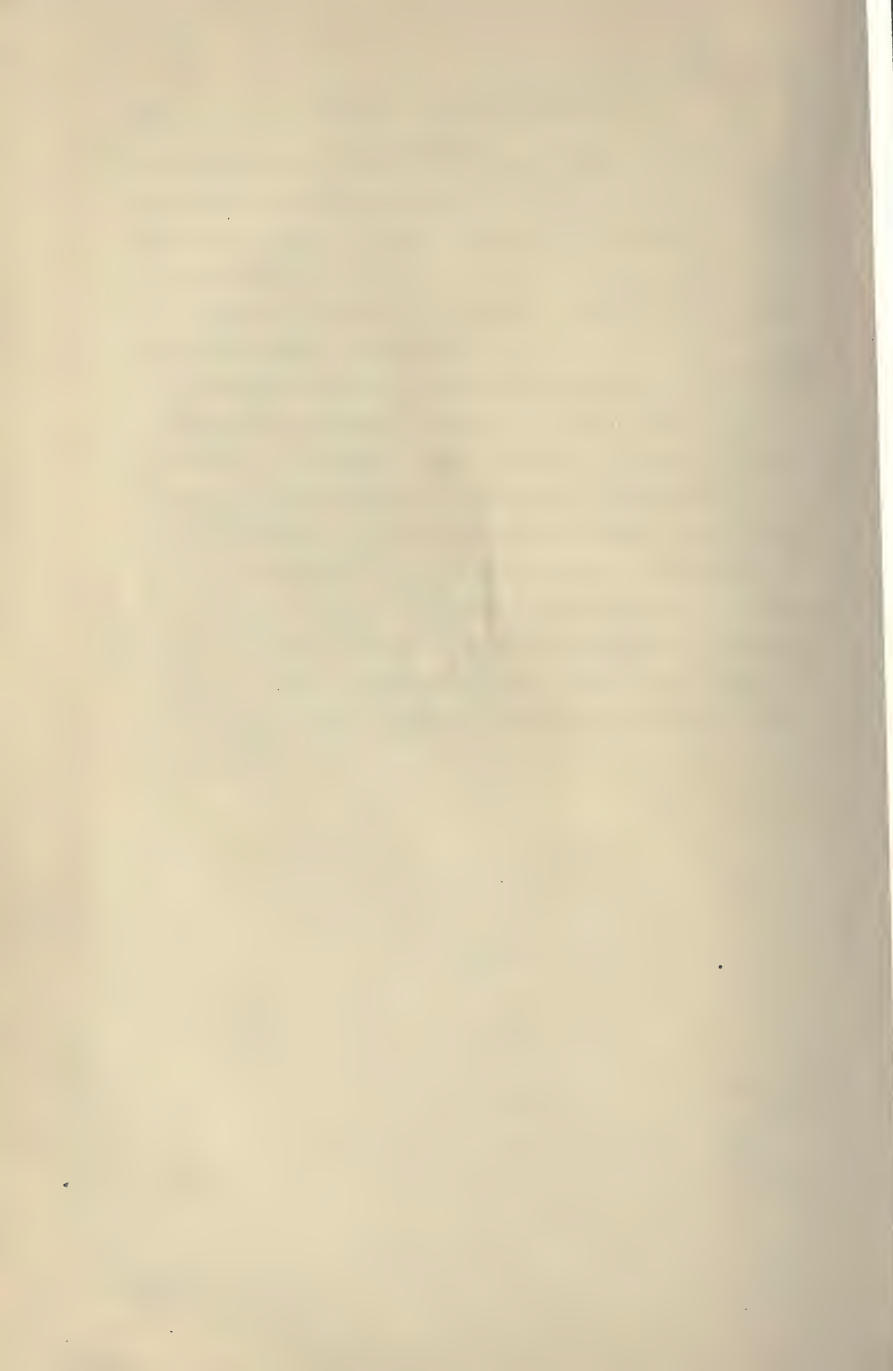
circling arms, from his lips drifted the name of the woman once so dearly loved, his lids fluttered and came softly down. In another moment he was sleeping like a child.

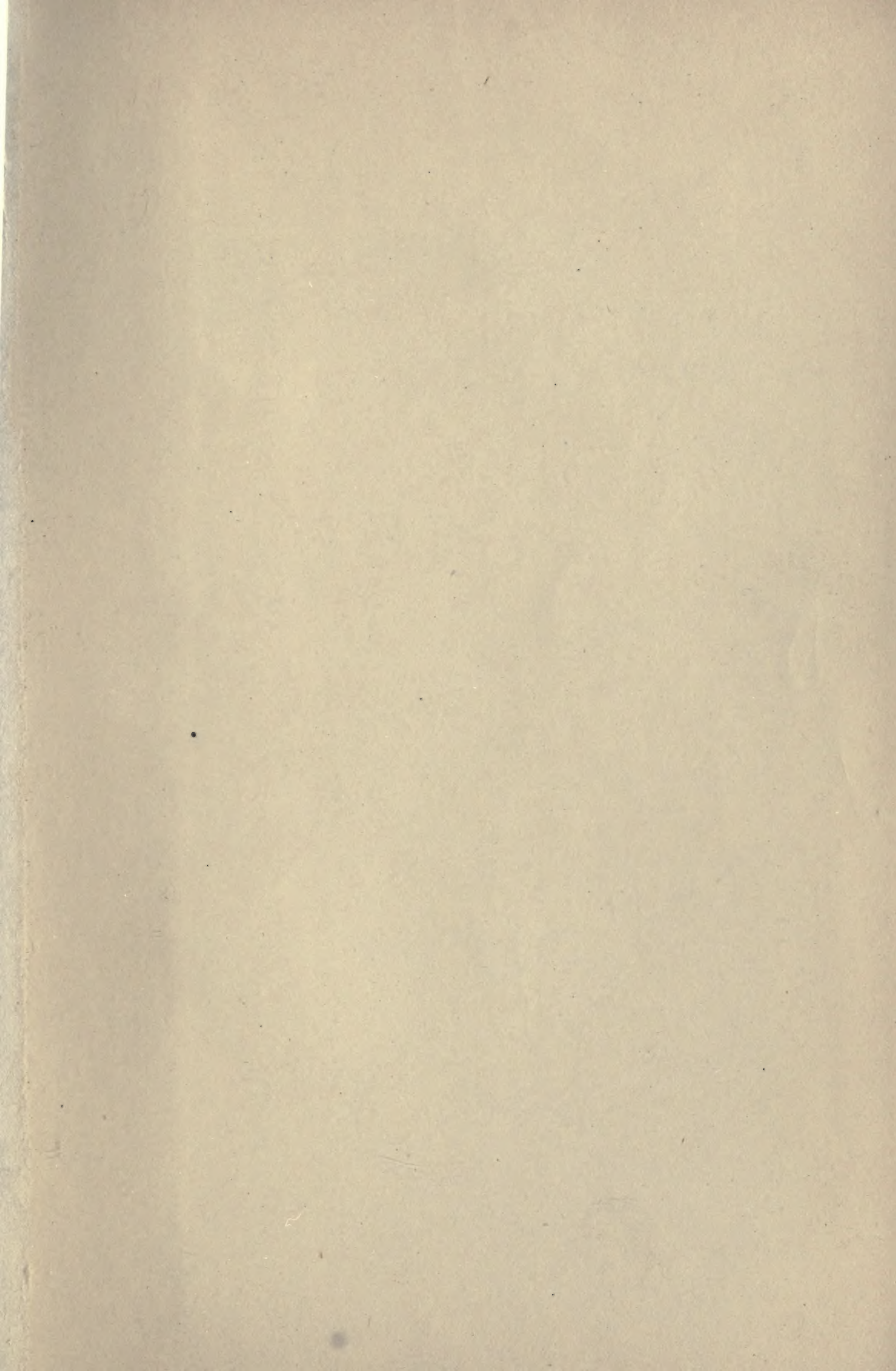
“Kenneth,” she whispered, “see!” Her eyes were like stars in a mist.

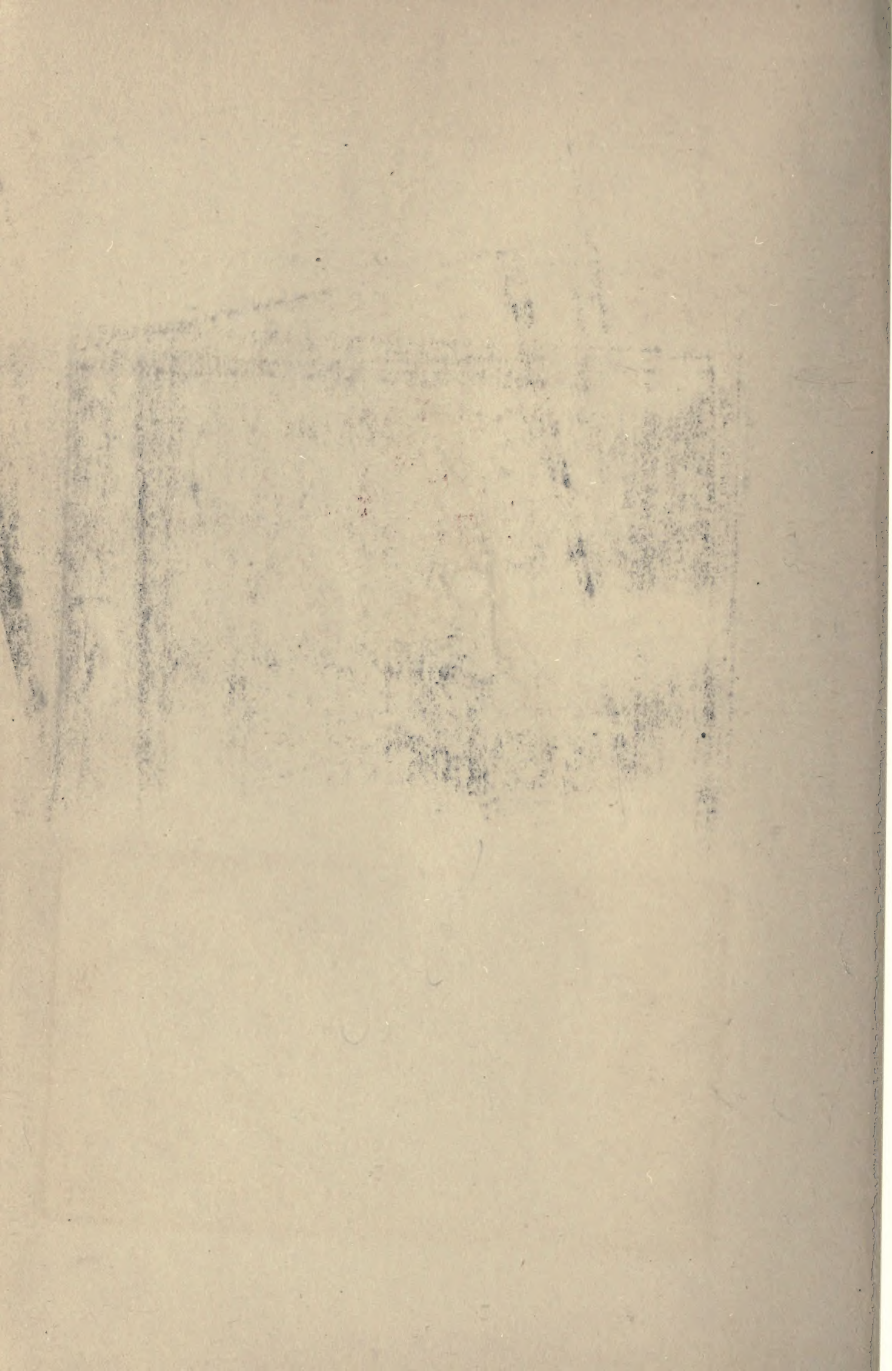
Kenneth looked. At the sight his soul went out in thankfulness and homage. Here, her bosom a pillow for the weary, was the one to whom through strange and devious ways destiny had guided his anxious heart. Now and forever she was to him the embodiment of all royal courage, all simple and unalterable faith. On her breast would he, too, find a haven, in her trust would lie his solace. Whatever the future might hold, here was the anchorage of his spirit. He dropped on his knees beside her.

FINIS









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Sullivan, Alan
The inner door

University of Toronto Robarts

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JULIE BEDDOES

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